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DECEMBER 1998/JANUARY 1999 ISSUE 30



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Cover photo, Mark Ferri. These pages, Scott Phillips (upper left); France Ruffenach (above); Mark Ferri (bottom left and below).



66 Bake a classic French *gâteau* for a special meal.

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Katherine Alford ("Roasting a Tenderloin," p. 32) was lured to New York to follow an acting career but soon found that the nightly performance behind a restaurant stove was much more exciting. She became a chef at Hubert's, a pioneer of New American cooking and went on to run the kitchen at the award-winning Quilted Giraffe. Katherine found her true

calling as a teacher when she was Director of Instruction at Peter Kump's New York Cooking School. She's currently sharpening her acting skills for a television cooking show she's working on. But her next big production will be Katherine Alford's School for Cooking, which will open in New York City in 1999, and which will be geared to nonprofessionals.

North Carolina natives **Mary Corpening Barber** and **Sara Corpening** ("Savory Bread Puddings," p. 38) grew up loving good food and knowing that they wanted to make a career out of cooking it. After training at both Peter Kump's New York Cooking School and La Varenne in France, the twins worked at top restaurants in New York, including the Quilted Giraffe, Montrachet, March, and Tribeca Grill, before moving to California. Today they operate their own successful catering company, Thymes Two, based in San Francisco and have worked up a very successful cookbook writing collaboration with **Lori Lyn Narlock**, a food and wine writer and culinary consultant who's based in Napa, California. The trio has written two books, *Smoothies and Wraps*; a third book, *Cocktail Food*, is due out from Chronicle Books in the fall.

Siblings **Mitchell** and **Carrie Davis** ("Potato Latkes," p. 42) have been cooking together since they were 10 and 16, respectively. Mitchell, the director of publications for The James Beard Foundation in New York City, is the author of *Cook Something: Simple Recipes & Sound Advice to Bring Good Food Into Your Fabulous Lifestyle* (Macmillan). Carrie teaches baking and art at an Ontario high school and is the author of *The Naturally Sweet Baker: 150 Decadent Desserts Made with Honey, Maple Syrup & Other Delicious Alternatives to Refined Sugar* (Macmillan).

Caprial Pence ("Warm Salads," p. 44) is probably best known for her popular television show, *Cooking with Caprial*, and her many cookbooks (the latest is *Caprial's Bistro-Style Cuisine*). But this CIA-trained chef first made her mark as Chef de Cuisine of Fullers Restaurant in Seattle (winning the James Beard Award for Best Chef of the Northwest in 1990), before moving back to her native Portland, Oregon, with her husband, John, to open a neighborhood bistro of their own. These days Caprial and John are enjoying a new challenge—weekly in-house cooking classes in a newly expanded area of their restaurant, now called Caprial's Bistro.



Joanne Chang ("Holiday Cookies for Grownups," p. 49) first started baking and selling cookies from her tiny basement dormitory kitchen when she was in college. Now she bakes professionally in a much grander kitchen at Mistral, a restaurant in Boston, after spending the last year making French pastries at

Payard Pâtisserie in New York City. Joanne is working on opening Flour, her own pastry shop in Boston, which will specialize in artisan breads, elegant cakes, fine pastries, and, of course, homemade cookies.

Joanne Smart ("Gifts for Cooks," p. 54) has been an associate editor at *Fine Cooking* since 1994. Any of her friends or family who read her article will know what they're getting for Christmas this year.

Fran Gage ("Getting a Good Crust On Rustic Breads," p. 58) opened Pâtisserie Française in San Francisco in December of 1984. From its beginning, it consistently won critical acclaim for its pastry, bread, and chocolate. But a fire in 1995 prompted her to close the bakery and focus more on teaching, writing and consulting. Her current project is a book on food essays with recipes to be published by Sasquatch Books this spring.

Sally Samspon ("Panties," p. 62) is a food writer based in Boston. She got her start by writing a collection of recipes from a restaurant where she was a chef—*Recipes from the Night Kitchen: A Practical Guide to Spectacular Soups, Stews & Chilies*. She has since written several other cookbooks, including *Chic Simple Cooking*, and collaborated with Todd English on *The Olives Table* and *The Figs Table*. Her latest book is *The \$50 Dinner Party* (Simon & Schuster).



Susan G. Purdy ("Dacquoise," p. 66) is a cookbook author and traveling culinary instructor. She's the author of *Let Them Eat Cake* (William Morrow), which was nominated for a 1998

James Beard Award, and *Have Your Cake and Eat it, Too* (William Morrow), winner of the 1994 IACP/Julia Child Cookbook Award. In addition, she has written two baking classics, *As Easy as Pie* and *A Piece of Cake*.

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-Jesse Sartain, Awards Director
American Culinary Institute



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Poached chicken and a nice hot cup of soup

I'd like to comment on Joanne Weir's chicken salad article in *Fine Cooking* #27 (p. 30), in which she poaches the chicken for one of her recipes. I recommend using the Oriental method for poaching chicken, which gives a really flavorful result. Put a nice, plump chicken in a pot with celery, carrots, onions, and bay leaves. Add enough water to just cover, and then remove the chicken from the pot. With the heat on high, bring the water to a rolling boil. At that moment, put the room-temperature chicken into the pot and let the water return to a boil. Boil the chicken for two minutes and then turn off the heat, put the lid on the pot, and do not remove it for one hour. The chicken is then done. This I call Jewish-Chinese chicken soup. Your poached chicken will be super. Let it cool, remove the meat for your chicken salad, putting the bones and skin back into the soup pot.

If you're using chicken feet, now is the time to trim, singe, skin, and add them to the broth. Simmer for about an hour, strain, add a few new veggies, a cup of cooked rice, and enjoy.

—Don McDiarmid, via e-mail

Marination improves flavor and maybe even your health

In his article "Juicy & Fast Brochettes on the Grill" (FC #28, p. 28), Steve Johnson states his preference to "add

flavor and moisture to grilled foods with a final sauce rather than with pre-grilling marinades, which can actually do more harm than good." While I believe Chef Johnson wrote a superb article and is to be congratulated for his attention to detail, the advantages of marination were completely disregarded.

A marination using proper ingredients over a sufficiently long time most certainly does tenderize (as well as infuse with flavor) throughout all the meat without causing fluid loss.

Of particular interest to diners frequently enjoying flame-grilled food is the exciting current research (like that conducted by Mark Knize of California's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory), which indicates that marination may reduce the risk of cancer by dramatically reducing the amounts of carcinogenic and mutagenic substances formed in the grilling of meat.

—Russell Mudry,
chemist and chef/proprietor,
Wildflowers Kitchens,
St. Catharines, Ontario

Food Science contributor Shirley O. Corriher replies:

I'm sure when Steve Johnson said "more harm than good," he was referring to the fact that leaving meat in an acidic marinade for too long can make the surface of the meat quite mushy. But Mr. Mudry is right about the interesting research. Researchers Salmon, Knize, and Felton at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory have reported early work that indicated a reduction in one potentially carcinogenic substance (heterocyclic

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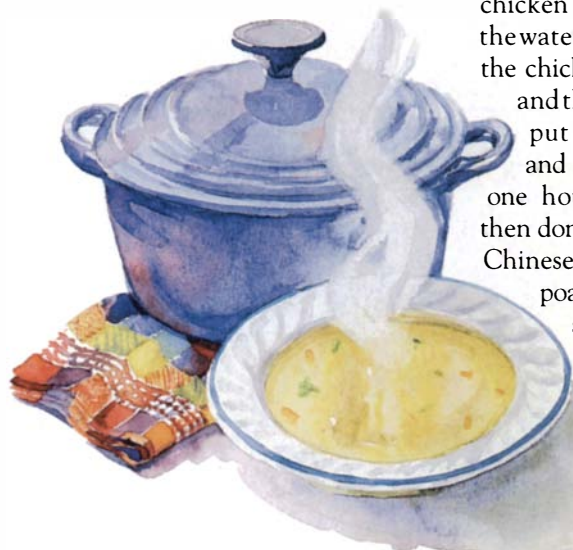
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LETTERS

amines) when a chicken breast was marinated in a mix of brown sugar, olive oil, cider vinegar, garlic, mustard, lemon juice, and salt before grilling. The length of marination did not seem significant, but when the meat was overcooked, the reduction in HCAs was lost.

Let me butter my own potatoes

I really took exception to the letter you published in *Fine Cooking* #28 (p. 10), in which Mary Flaum admonished you and author Josh Eisen for a mashed potato

work and don't become a social "at it againer."

—John Martin, via e-mail

An important note about the Thanksgiving menu

In our Thanksgiving menu in *Fine Cooking* #29, the recipe for Buttercup Squash & Leek Soup with Herb Butter on p. 34 makes a very peppery soup. Michael Brisson's recipe calls for 1 tablespoon ground white pepper, and we tested this recipe as printed in our kitchen with good results. We've heard from a few people, however, that the soup was too peppery, so perhaps there's a larger variation in the strength of white pepper than we'd realized. The addition of the herb butter to the finished soup is essential for rounding out the flavors and smoothing the peppery taste, and the more butter, the milder the soup. We recommend starting with 1 teaspoon white pepper instead of 1 tablespoon and adding more to taste if you like.

Roasty chicken brine

When I read your article on roasting chicken (*FC* #26), I was surprised that you didn't mention one sure way to guarantee moist, flavorful chicken: brining. A brined bird doesn't require basting, being cooked breast side down, or the addi-

tion of butter under the skin. I usually cook mine in a smoker, but this method works just as well in the oven.

To 1 gallon of water, add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup salt (noniodized is best; iodized may impart a bitter taste), $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup molasses, plus whatever seasonings you like: powdered onion, garlic, etc. Submerge [and refrigerate] the chicken in the solution for 12 to 16 hours. Rinse well and roast as desired. This of course works for boneless turkey breasts and other

poultry parts. I think if you try this method, you'll never do it any other way.

I love your magazine and wouldn't miss an issue. Thanks for the great ideas.

—Richard Schwaninger, via e-mail

Errata

The "under-the-turkey" rack from Sur La Table we mentioned in *Sources* (*FC* #29, p. 90) is still a good deal at \$11.95, even if it isn't \$1.95, as we printed. Our apologies. ♦

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat to the temperature in the recipe; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the suggested time in the recipe. For meat and poultry, use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ♦ Butter is unsalted.
- ♦ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ♦ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ♦ Sugar is granulated.
- ♦ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ♦ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.



recipe with 14 tablespoons of butter for 2 pounds of potatoes. Ms. Flaum's letter implies that I should have social responsibility and not use lots of butter in this great recipe. My social responsibility ends with great taste, and hers should end by keeping her opinions to herself.

I have been a subscriber to your publication since the first issue and have kept all the issues. Keep up the good

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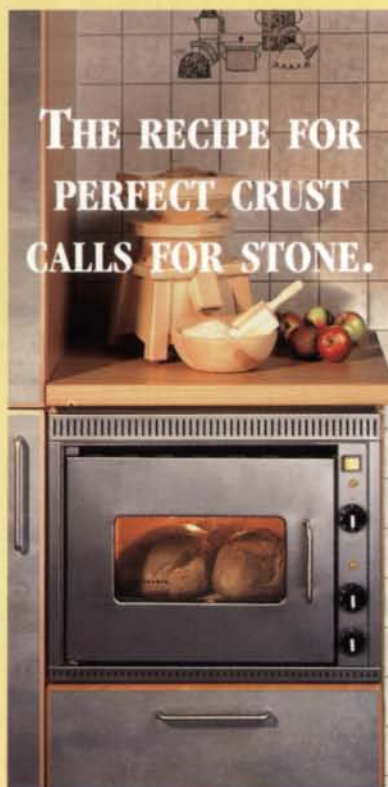
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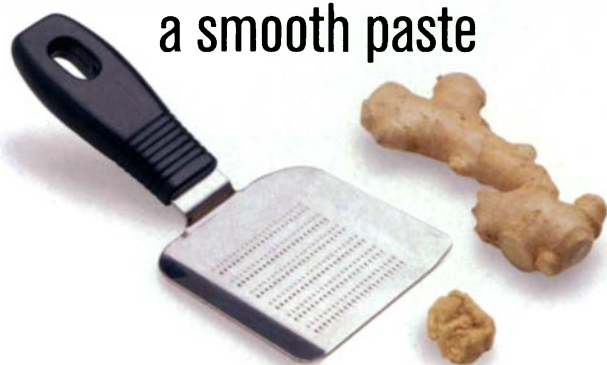
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Events

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Indio, California
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Indio celebrates the tamale, with pork, beef, chicken, and vegetable versions sold at dozens of booths at this festival, which also includes cooking demonstrations by celebrity chefs, a parade, music and dance, and children's activities. Call 760/347-0676.

COOKING CLASSES

Prudence Sloane's Cooking School
Hampton, Connecticut
December 8: An Old English Christmas—Roast Beef & Yorkshire Pudding with traditional side dishes and dessert.
December 12: Show-Stopping Holiday Desserts—*bûche de Noël* and *croquembouche*. Call 860/455-0596.

NATIONAL PIE CHAMPIONSHIPS

Hotel Boulderado
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January 23–24
This pie-baking competition is open to amateurs (adults and children), professionals, commercial and retail pie-makers. Pie-lovers can taste, create, and watch demonstrations. Call 303/740-7437.

CITRUS FESTIVAL

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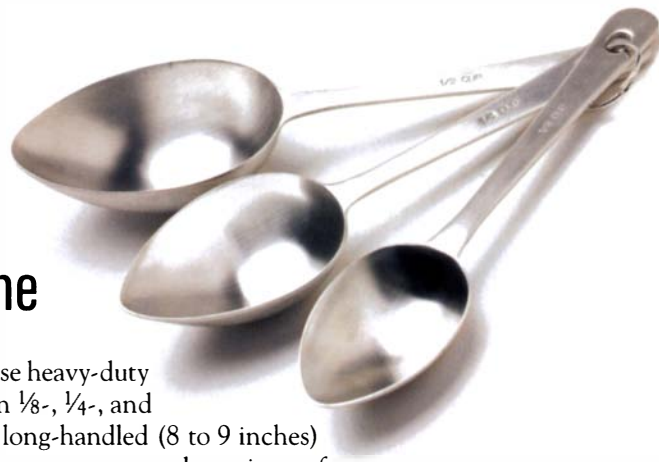
These lovely glazed ceramic cake stands are the real thing, imported from France, where they grace the windows of pastry shops. The flat top makes easy work of transferring pie and cake slices to plates. They're dishwasher safe. The small and large stands (\$28 and \$36) are available from Rue de France, 800/777-0998.

Fluted cutters are versatile and sturdy



These stainless-steel cutters are so handy for dozens of things in the kitchen, from appetizers like polenta crostini or cheese wafers to biscuits, cookies, and sandwiches. A tin of 11 graduated sizes from $\frac{3}{4}$ to $3\frac{5}{8}$ inches is \$14.50 from The Wooden Spoon, 800/431-2207.

Scoop and measure at the same time



You'll love the feel of these heavy-duty stainless-steel scoops. In $\frac{1}{8}$ -, $\frac{1}{4}$ -, and $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup measures, these long-handled (8 to 9 inches) spoons are designed to scoop up equal portions of muffin, cupcake, or pancake batter or to dip into tall jars of dry ingredients like sugar or oatmeal. The set retails for about \$20 at Restoration Hardware (call 800/762-1005 for locations) and major department stores. Or you can order the scoops from the Chef's Catalog (800/338-3232).

Smooth, buttery Blanco olive oil



When Giovanni Sapienza brought a sample of a voluptuous olive oil from his family's farm in Sicily into Formaggio Kitchen, a Boston gourmet store, the owners decided right away to begin bottling it. Blanco's aroma reminded us of ripe tomatoes; it had a very buttery feel and a rich flavor with almost no bitterness. You can order this special oil (\$29.95 for 500ml, about 1 pint) from Formaggio Kitchen's new catalog. Ask about the company's incredible cheeses, too, which are ripened in its own cellar. Call 617/354-4750.



A carving set that's handsome and sharp

A really useful carving set has to work well in the kitchen *and* look good on the table. This forged stainless-steel set with rosewood handles from Lamson & Goodnow does just that. The set includes an 8-inch knife

that's perfect for carving a turkey or slicing a beef tenderloin, and a 10½-inch fork that's curved to help you lift roasts out of the pan. The set retails for \$154. To order or ask for retailers near you, call 800/872-6564.



Mini pie plates go from freezer to oven to table

Emile Henry, the French maker of sturdy, attractive clay ovenware, has introduced a new line of dishes in earthy colors called Le Potier. The line includes these mini pie plates (5½-inch diameter, 8-ounce volume), which are perfect for individual chicken pot pies or fruit pies. They're great looking and will travel from freezer to oven to table. The mini pie plates (in green and blue) are available from Sur La Table (800/243-0852) for \$13.50 each or \$39.95 for four. For other retailers, call Emile Henry at 302/326-4800. To see other colors and dishes in the Le Potier line, check out the company's web site, www.emilehenryusa.com.

10-year-old balsamic vinegar tastes of fruit and caramel

A little bit of Vecchia Dispensa ten-year aged balsamic vinegar goes a long way. It has a rich, complex flavor that reminds tasters of dark fruit like cherries and blackberries. The flavor hints of caramel, but it isn't overly sweet. Bottled especially for Zingerman's (whose tasters say it's the most intensely flavored balsamic of its age that they've tried), at \$30 for 250ml (about 8 ounces), Vecchia Dispensa is not only a special treat, it's also a really good buy. To order, call Zingerman's (the gourmet store in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with the "mail-order catalog for food lovers") at 888/636-8162.



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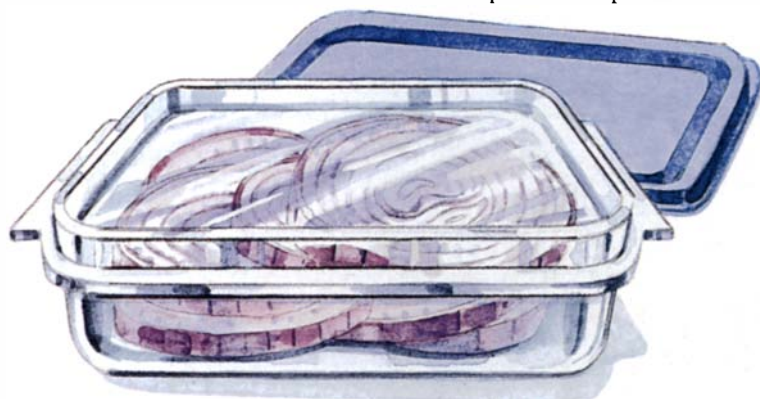
Send it to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or e-mail us at fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

Chopping onions in advance

How far ahead of time can I chop onions before incorporating them into a dish? They get bitter and smelly when I chop and hold them overnight.

—R. Harris,
via e-mail

Carolyn Dille replies: It's true that sliced or diced onions don't store well—their texture suffers, turning rapidly from crisp to limp, and they acquire an unpleasant flavor



Sliced onions hold up better if stored in a container of cold water.

and smell. The odor is so strong that it can permeate plastic containers, including plastic wrap, and affect nearby food in the refrigerator.

The culprits here are the sulfur compounds that reside within the raw onion. When these compounds are released by chopping or dicing, they oxidize, creating odors. Sweet varieties, such as Maui, Walla Walla, and Vidalia, have lower concentrations of these sulfur compounds, but they'll still taste and smell "off" if cut several hours ahead.

For the best onion flavor, cut onions no more than an hour or two before cooking or eating. To retard their oxidation and extend that two-hour window by three or four hours, rinse the cut onions in water, or store them in an air-

tight glass jar (or other non-reactive container) filled with ice water.

For some recipes, you can chop and cook the onions in advance. Let the onions cool after cooking, and then refrigerate them in a glass or other nonreactive container for a day or two.

Onions are an indispensable ingredient in Carolyn Dille's dozen cookbooks, including one that's dedicated to them: The Onion Book (Interweave Press).

What are those unusual spices in naan bread?

I recently had a wonderful Indian naan bread with ajowan and kalonji seeds. What are they?

—Carlyn Buckler,
via e-mail

Julie Sahni replies: Naan, the fabulous flatbread of north India, can be baked plain or, as you've discovered, it can be intricately seasoned with spices, ajowan and kalonji among them.

Ajowan, also called ajwain or carom, resembles celery seeds. It has an assertive thyme-like fragrance and is particularly useful in baking because it helps cut the starchy taste of flour. Ajowan is also a powerful digestive; hence it's almost always used in Indian recipes that include beans, peas, and starchy root vegetables. I love ajowan with sea-

food and pork, and especially combined with other spices as a rub.

Kalonji, or kalaunji, are tiny, teardrop-shaped black seeds with a satiny sheen, popularly known as nigella or black onion seeds. Because of their visual appeal, kalonji seeds are a favorite garnish—like poppy seeds—for sprinkling over breads, rolls, and pilafs. Indian cooks find their captivating, celery-like aroma perfect for stir-fried vegetables, curries, and sweet chutneys. I adore them and use them in salads, soups, crêpes, and fritters.

Both ajowan and kalonji, available at Indian groceries, keep indefinitely when stored whole, tightly covered, in a cool and dry place.

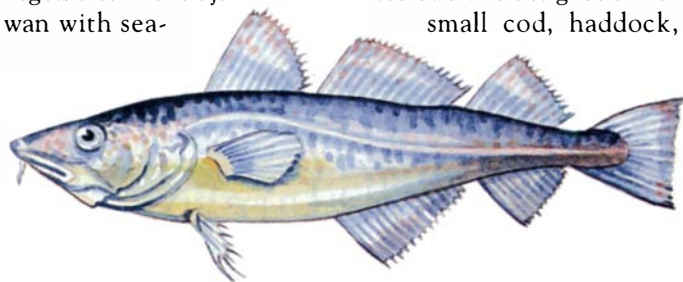
Julie Sahni is a cooking teacher and author. Her most recent book is Julie Sahni's Introduction to Indian Cooking (Ten Speed Press).

What kind of fish is scrod?

Just what, exactly, is scrod? We heard somewhere that it isn't really a fish.

—Brian Costello
& Jon Sandberg,
via e-mail

Jon Rowley replies: Technically, scrod isn't a fish but a size of fish. In the New England seafood trade, scrod is used as a size designation for small cod, haddock,



Scrod is actually just a small cod, haddock, or pollack.



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or pollack weighing 1½ to 2½ pounds. The term probably originated on the Boston Fish Pier, where it has been a dockside grading designation for as long as anyone can remember.

The Food & Drug Administration, which has jurisdiction over fish names used in interstate commerce, has ruled that the term scrod can be used only if it's linked to an identifying fish (as in "scrod haddock" or "scrod cod"). Enforcement of fish names, however, is not a high priority for the FDA, so a New Englander might very well find the name scrod standing alone on restaurant menus or in retail fish cases.

Jon Rowley is a marketing specialist, food historian, and seafood expert who's based in Seattle.

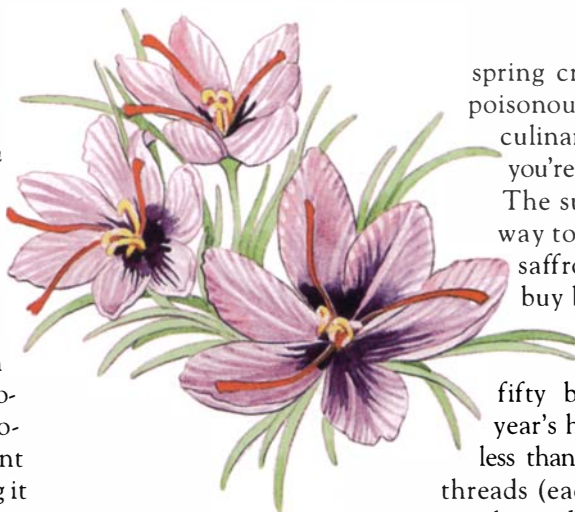
Harvesting your own saffron

Can I grow my own saffron from the purple crocuses in my garden?

—Dave Vanderbloemen, Morganton, NC

Clarke Hess replies:

The fall-blooming saffron flower, *Crocus sativus*, provides cooks with an aromatic and sunny colorant for many dishes. Growing it is easy—the plant thrives with little attention—but you must first be certain that you have the right crocus. It's crucial to avoid confusing the culinary saffron crocus with its deadly cousin, *Colchicum autumnale*, or meadow saffron. Both are purple, crocus-like plants that flower in autumn. Meadow saffron, all parts of which are poisonous,



All edible saffron flowers are crocuses, but not all crocuses are edible saffron.

is nicknamed Naked Ladies because its flowers appear after the leaves have died.

Another potential pitfall is to mistake the colorful, Dutch-hybrid crocuses that flower in spring for the true saffron crocus. Although the

spring crocuses are not poisonous, they have no culinary value (unless you're a chipmunk).

The surest and safest way to start your own saffron patch is to buy bulbs from reputable retailers.

If you plant fifty bulbs, the first year's harvest will yield less than a tablespoon of threads (each crocus offers just three edible stigmas), but each year the bulbs produce more blossoms.

Clarke Hess's family has been growing saffron in Pennsylvania for five generations. He wrote about saffron for Taunton's Kitchen Garden (#12). You can order saffron bulbs in August from McClure & Zimmerman, PO Box 368, Friesland, WI 53935; 800/883-6998. ♦



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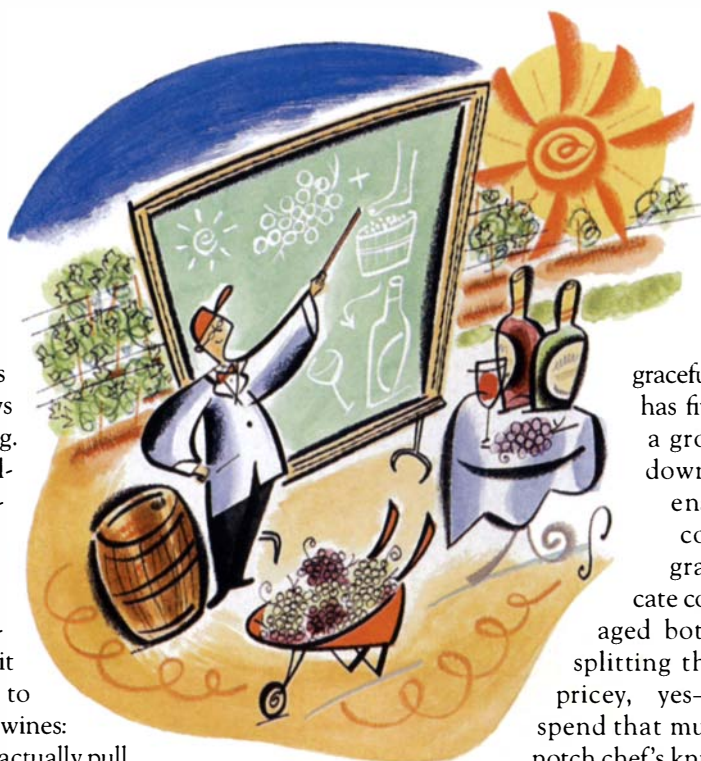
Wine Gifts for Every Sort of Wine Drinker

Just about everyone I know loves wine, but my wine-loving friends are a varied lot, from enthusiastic novices to seasoned professionals. There's a lot of wine paraphernalia out there, but it's often hard to tell which gadgets are useful and which ones look cool but will end up sitting in a drawer. Here are some suggestions for practical, educational, and delicious gifts that any wine lover would love.

Give a simple, handy tool

A Vacu-Vin (about \$10) is almost as useful as a corkscrew, particularly if you don't polish off a bottle of wine in one sitting. The simple pump sucks the oxygen out of the bottle (oxygen is what makes wine deteriorate) and preserves the

wine so it retains its flavors for days after uncorking. Rosina Tinari Wilson, a *Fine Cooking* contributing editor, warns that while a Vacu-Vin is fine for current-release wines, it may be harmful to delicate or older wines: the vacuum may actually pull subtleties from what's left in the bottle. She prefers the Private Preserve wine saver (also about \$10), which protects the wine by forcing the oxygen out of the bottle and blanketing the remaining wine with nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and argon. Private Preserve is environmentally safe, and one canister gives about 120 blasts.



gracefully. The worm has five spirals and a grooved thread down its center to ensure that the corkscrew will grab even delicate corks from well-aged bottles without splitting them. A little pricey, yes—but you'd spend that much on a top-notch chef's knife.

A spiffy gift for a wine-loving friend (or yourself) might be the Château Laguiolle Sommelier corkscrew (about \$100). It comes in a small leather pouch and has a slender, compact, polished horn body that felt great in my hand and let me pop even stubborn corks smoothly and

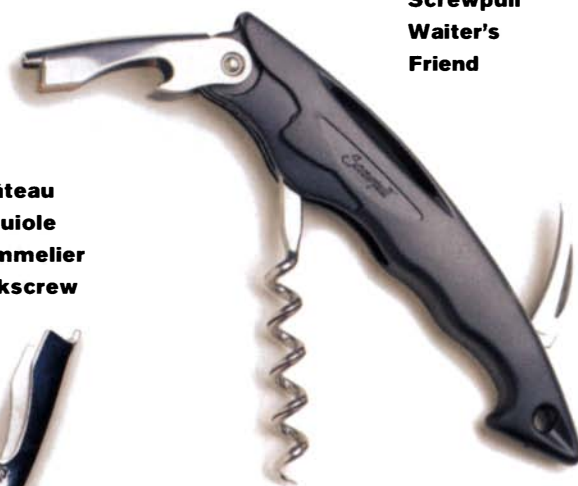
The Screwpull Waiter's Friend (\$50) works well, too. It isn't as compact or as elegant as Château Laguiolle's, and the body is made of plastic rather than horn, but it also has a grooved, five-spiral worm and a sleek design. The advantage of the wooden box that the wine opener comes in was lost on me (my corkscrew lives in



Vacu-Vin



**Château
Laguiolle
Sommelier
corkscrew**



**Screwpull
Waiter's
Friend**

the silverware drawer because I use it often), but this corkscrew is easy to use.

The *365 Great Wines Calendar* by Joshua Wesson and Richard Marmet (Workman, \$10) is a page-per-day calendar that features one wine each day with a description, price, and pairing tips. A clever stocking stuffer for anyone who wants to know more about wine, this calendar is a good bet for the office holiday grabbag. Many of the bottles cost less than \$10 (Wesson and Marmet know a lot about these; they're the co-founders of Best Cellars, a wine store in Manhattan that stocks only bottles \$10 and under).

Intensive courses for learning near the source

Many cooking schools and colleges offer once-a-week wine courses. But for a more concentrated experience (and a super-deluxe gift), consider travelling to a wine region and studying there. John Thoreen, a wine tutor in the

Napa Valley, offers custom-designed courses for individuals or groups at Meadowood, a small luxury hotel in the Napa Valley where he's the wine director (800/458-8080 or 707/967-1205). The price is steep (\$900 per day per group), but Thoreen's approach is completely personalized, and getting together a group of friends or colleagues lowers the cost per person.

In France, the Ecole du Vin in Bordeaux (www.vins-bordeaux.fr) offers weekend and three- and four-day courses. Level I is a four-day study of Bordeaux wines that covers tasting technique, wine-making and aging methods, grape varieties, and the *appellation* system. Tuition is 2,000 francs (about \$350) per person. The Ecole du Vin in Burgundy (www.bivb.com, after November 15) gives a variety of two- to five-day classes on getting to know Burgundy, tasting, and wine and food pairing. Costs range from 1,300 to 3,250 francs (about \$250 to \$600).

Give a special bottle

I asked a few experts in the wine trade (who can get their hands on just about anything) what's on their holiday wish lists.

"I'd be delighted if Santa left me a bottle of Billecart-Salmon rosé Champagne—and if it's a magnum, so much the better," says Rosina Tinari Wilson, who claims she knows no wine that's more versatile with food. "Elegant, balanced, rich, that beautiful color—it'll be great with the pheasant I'll be roasting for the holidays." A bottle is about \$50.

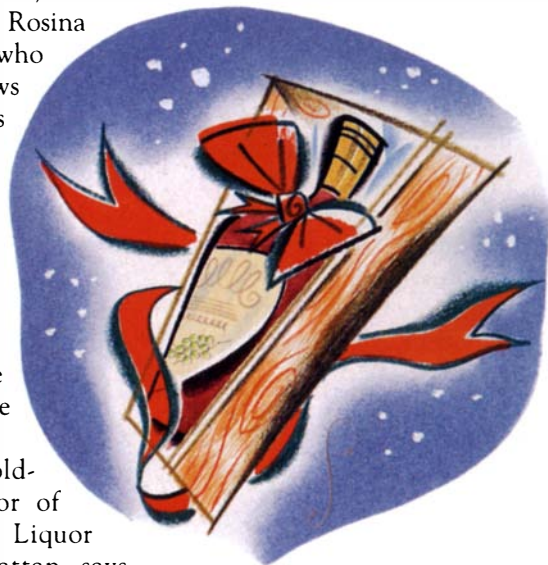
Michael Goldstein, proprietor of Park Avenue Liquor Shop in Manhattan, says "I've fallen in love with Australian Shiraz. It's like a cross between a Bordeaux and a Burgundy—intense, smooth, spectacular. I'd love a bottle of d'Arenberg Deadarm Shiraz 1995 (\$55). It's like drinking a \$200 French wine, and would be much nicer than getting a fountain pen."

Larry Stone, the wine director at Rubicon restaurant in San Francisco, picked Pahlmeyer 1995 red table wine, a Napa Valley Cabernet-Merlot blend (\$60). "It's intense, smoky, and berry-flavored, with great structure for aging and delicious with grilled rosemary- and lavender-scented lamb."

Peter Granoff, proprietor of Virtual Vineyards, an online wine retailer, was reluctant to pick one bottle ("I want them all"), but he decided on a

bottle of Elkhorn Peak Cellars 1994 Fagan Creek Vineyard Pinot Noir. He loves the "gorgeous perfume, velvety texture, and luscious fruit" from this tiny Napa Valley producer. A bottle retails for about \$24.

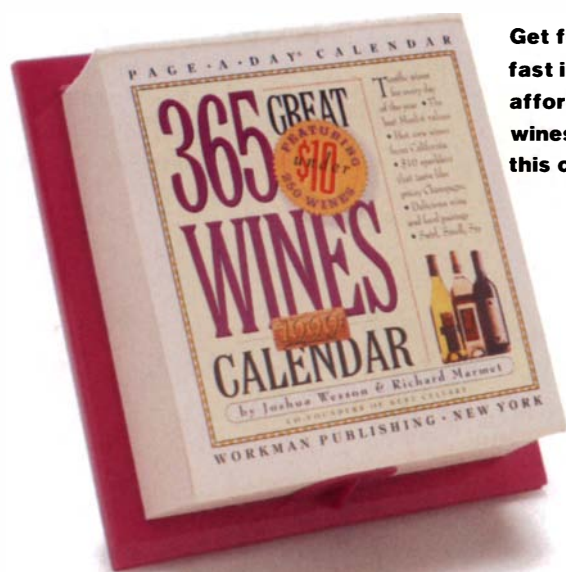
Karen MacNeil, a wine writer and teacher, says she'd



love a vintage bottle of Coulée de Serrant. So would I. Dry or off-dry, fruity, and intense, this Chenin Blanc is from a tiny vineyard in the Loire Valley planted by Cistercian monks in the 12th century, and it's truly memorable; great as an apéritif or with fish. Current vintages are about \$50; a 1989 is about \$60. "I can't drink a glass of that wine the way I'd drink a glass of regular Chardonnay," says MacNeil. "It inspires me to think about history, philosophy, and the wonder of wine throughout civilization." Happy holidays.

For more information on these gifts, see Sources, p. 87.

Amy Albert, an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*, would be happy to find a bottle of old red Burgundy under the tree. ♦



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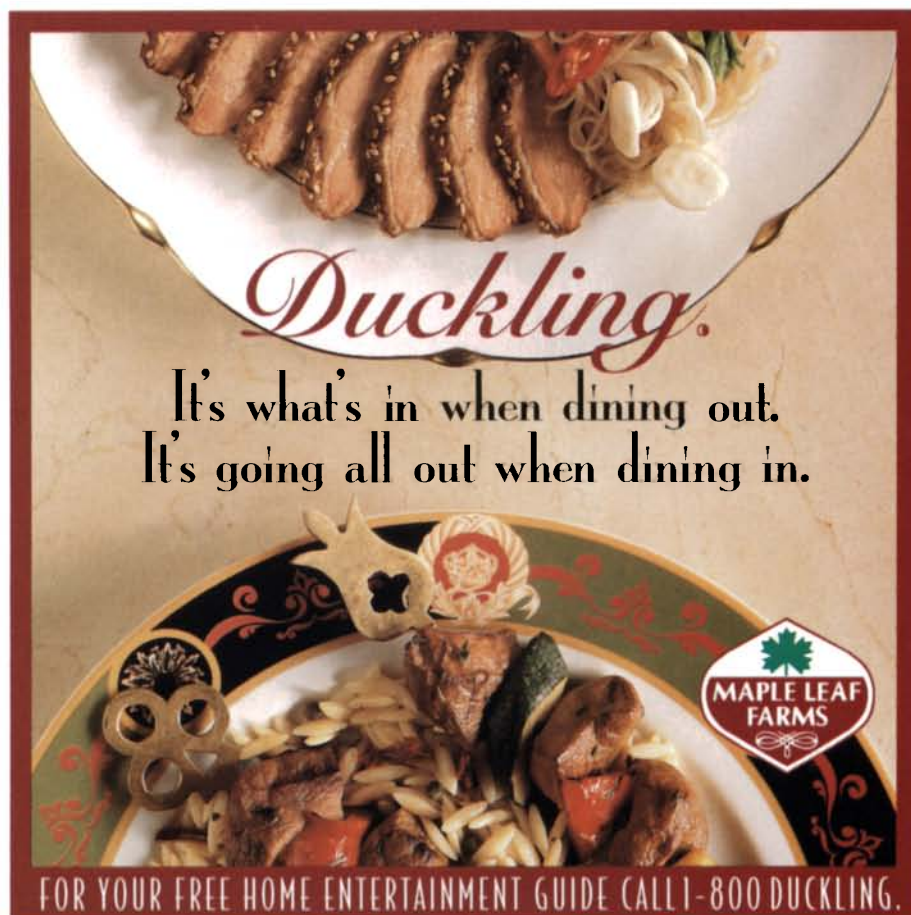


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Winter Cooking Showcases Nuts

The holidays and winter months are here, so nuts will probably show up several times on your shopping list. Traditional fall and winter ingredients, most nuts are at peak freshness and availability right now. Nuts add rich flavor and crunchy texture to both sweet and savory dishes—tossed whole into salads, chopped for breads and pie crusts, ground for Southeast Asian sauces, stirred into cake or cookie batters, and folded into ice cream. And a big bowl of mixed nuts on the table to crack seems to stimulate after-dinner conversation.

Taste before buying, if you can

Nuts in the shell are usually the very freshest and best-tasting. The shell keeps out light, insects, air, and mold, all of which cause nuts to dry out, turn rancid, or both.

When choosing nuts in the shell, look for whole, clean shells with no blemishes, holes, or cracks. Pick up a nut and shake it. Brazil nuts, hazel-

nuts, walnuts, pecans, and peanuts rattle freely in the shell if they're old and dry.

When choosing nuts out of the shell, look for plump, unbroken nutmeats. Avoid those that are discolored or shriveled. Airtight containers preserve freshness and flavor, but they make it impossible to taste the nuts until you leave the store.

When you are able to taste, choose nuts that are sweet and crunchy. Rancid nuts have a bitter, unpleasantly oily taste. A rancid nut can ruin an otherwise perfectly prepared dish, so always taste several nuts from the batch before you use them. But be careful when you taste black walnuts. Their characteristically strong, exotic flavor may seem wrong if you've never had them before.

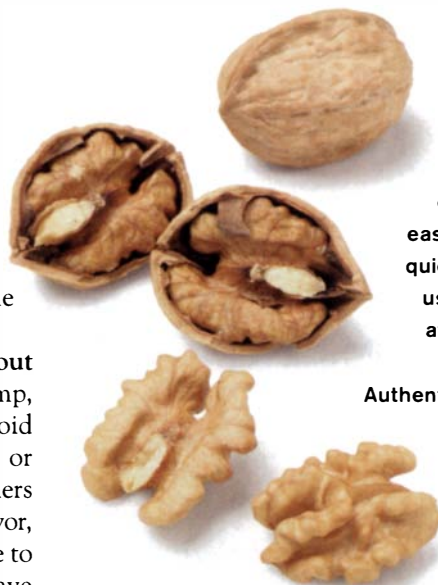
Store all nuts in a cool, dry place. Shelled nuts, unless they're vacuum-packed in cans, should be wrapped tightly and stored in

English walnuts, the walnuts we see most often, originally came from Persia. Walnuts are easy to shell, but they turn rancid quickly, so shell them only as you use them. Walnuts are delicious after dinner with cheese, pears, apples, and a glass of port. Authentic Italian pesto often includes walnuts as well as pine nuts.

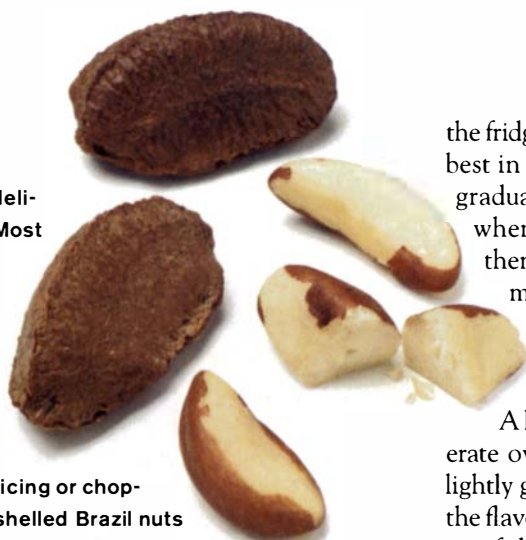
Black walnuts are native to America; they're more closely related to hickory nuts than to common English walnuts. Their flavor is strong, but in small amounts, they add exotic interest to cakes and cookies. Try them in a poultry stuffing. Black walnuts are hard to remove from their rock-hard shell, so you'll always see them sold shelled in broken pieces.

Pecans are another native American nut. They have an incomparably rich, sweet flavor and a tender, almost crumbly crunch. Try a few tablespoons finely chopped in your favorite pie dough recipe. Toss them into a salad of romaine and blue cheese, sprinkle them over candied yams, or fold them into a poultry stuffing.

Almonds are at their peak harvest in November, just in time for holiday baking. Use them whole, sliced, slivered, chopped, or ground in cakes, cookies, candies, tarts, pies, and puddings. Their milky-mild flavor pairs beautifully with vegetables and fish, too.



Brazil nuts have deliciously rich meat. Most often cracked and eaten after dinner, they're also good in fruitcakes, cookies, and candies. Use them to stuff dates or prunes. For easy slicing or chopping, first simmer shelled Brazil nuts in water for five minutes.



Peanuts are great roasted and eaten out of hand. They're also an essential ingredient in cuisines in warmer parts of the globe. Be cautious when substituting them for other nuts in baked goods. The strong flavor that stands up so well to hot chiles in Thai and Chinese cooking can overwhelm other ingredients.



Hazelnuts, also called **filberts**, are delicious ground in pastries, tortes, tarts, and ice cream. Add chopped hazelnuts to a winter fruit salad, or serve whole hazelnuts with soft cheese like Camembert or Brie. I love to dress steamed asparagus with a hazelnut vinaigrette and then sprinkle on plenty of roasted, chopped hazelnuts.



the fridge or freezer. Nuts keep best in the shell, but all nuts gradually turn rancid, even when frozen, so don't store them for more than a few months in the freezer.

Roasting brings out flavor

A light roasting in a moderate oven until fragrant and lightly golden will accentuate the flavor of most nuts. Just be careful not to overdo it because darkly roasted nuts will be bitter and dry. Roasted nuts turn rancid more quickly than raw ones, so use them within a few days after roasting.

Skinning isn't always a must; it's more a matter of aesthetics. If you're grinding almonds or hazelnuts for pastry, the skins incorporate into the mixture, and many cooks like the look of tiny specks of skin. With coarse chopped nuts like hazelnuts, which have a loose skin, pieces of skin tend to separate from the nut, so skinning them results in a cleaner look and taste.

To skin hazelnuts and even walnuts, roast them lightly and then remove the loose skin by rubbing a handful of nuts at a time in a dishtowel. For almonds, pour boiling water over the nuts, let them

Macadamia nuts have a subtle, rich flavor, with a texture that's more creamy than crisp.

Use them like chopped walnuts in breads, cakes, and cookies, substitute them for pecans in a pie, or serve them with drinks, lightly toasted and salted.

sit for several minutes, and then slip off the skins.

Grinding is easiest to do in an inexpensive drum-type nut or cheese grater. Nuts have a high fat content, so if you use a food processor, pulse briefly and pay close attention or you'll end up with nut butter.

Shelling peanuts doesn't require a nut-cracker, but for hard-shelled nuts, I still rely on my old-fashioned hinged nut cracker. A nut pick helps coax out reluctant walnut or pecan meats. And freezing Brazil nuts for a few hours seem to make their hard shells easier to crack.

Alan Tangren heads the pastry department at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. ♦

More at the market

Look for these winter favorites at your local produce counter.

♦ **Potatoes** and **celery root** to mash into silky purées or to slice and bake into warming gratins, layered with cream and topped with Gruyère.

♦ **Escarole**, **endive**, and **chicory** to serve with pan-seared chicken. Sauté the greens with the pan drippings and a bit of garlic.

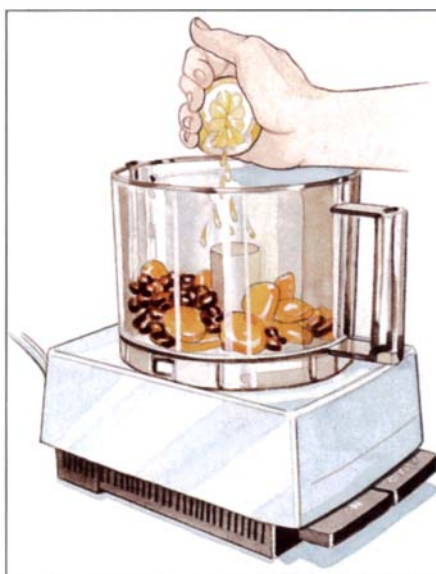
♦ **Oranges** and **tangerines** to brighten salads, main dishes, and sweets. Toss a few sections into a salad of endive, arugula, and pickled onions. For a quick sauce for seared tuna, boil fresh-squeezed juice until syrupy; drizzle on top. Grate the zest into scone or cookie dough.

Do you have a shortcut for a time-consuming cooking task, a novel use for an old kitchen tool, or an unusual way to stay organized in the kitchen? Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

Squirt lemon juice on dried fruit before processing

When chopping sticky dried fruit in your food processor, squeeze a little lemon juice on the fruit to keep it from sticking to the metal blade.

—Heather Darrell,
Victoria,
British Columbia



To keep dried fruit from sticking during processing, squeeze on some lemon juice.

Make your own pot handle covers

To move around hot pots and pans with heat conductive metal handles, you can either fumble with a towel or pot-holder or else do what I've done: make your own pot handle covers. Fold a regular potholder in half and sew up the side and one

two inches of tubing, insert the tongs, and store them in a drawer. The tongs won't catch on other utensils.

—Bernard Latasiewicz,
Detroit, MI

Score butter before unwrapping

Before unwrapping a stick of butter to store in the refrigerator, I score it through the wrapper along the table-spoon marks with the back of a knife. When the wrapper is removed, the indentations remain, making it easy to measure later.

—Dixie Wilson,
Olive Branch, MS

Poach eggs in a steamer basket

After trying all the traditional ways to poach eggs, such as adding vinegar to water and using those silly little metal circles, my husband came up with this method. He puts my Calphalon steamer basket in its pan and brings about an inch of water to a boil. He then butters four or five ramekins, cracks an egg into each one, and puts the ramekins in the steamer basket. He covers the pot and "steams" the eggs for exactly 3½ minutes and ends up with moist, perfectly rounded poached eggs to use in eggs Benedict, or whatever recipe calls for them.

—Joyce Lehman-Sharpe,
Longwood, FL

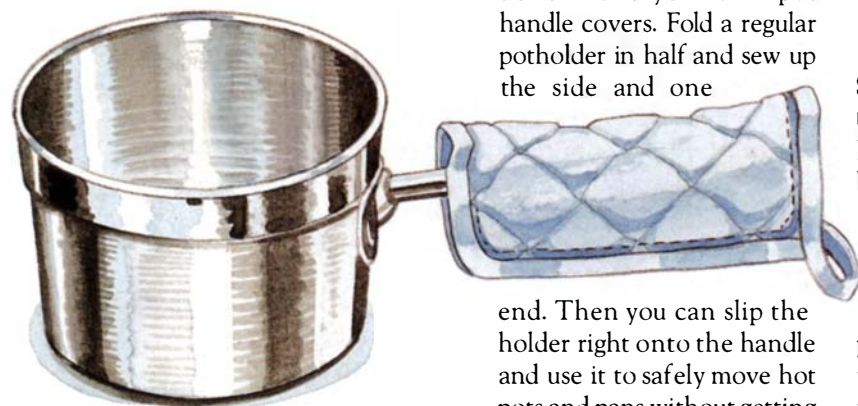
Scrub vegetables with sponge pad

I use the bristly side of a plastic scouring pad (a clean one that's just for this purpose) to scrub vegetables. It's ideal for potatoes, carrots, or beets. Often I don't even have to peel them afterward.

—Peri-Lyn Palmer,
Redwood City, CA

Warm sugar softens cold butter

For people like me who love to bake on the spur of the



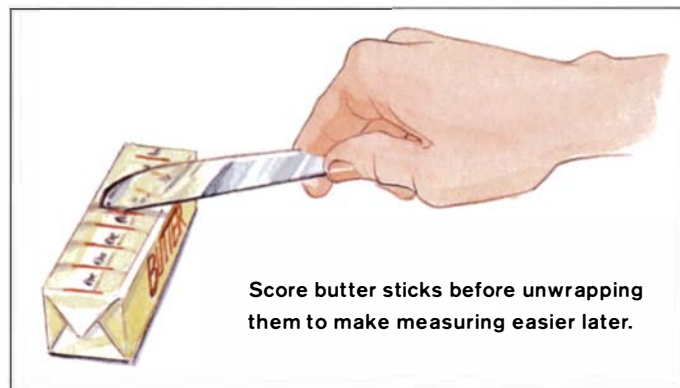
Fold a potholder in half and sew two sides closed to handle hot pans.

end. Then you can slip the holder right onto the handle and use it to safely move hot pots and pans without getting burned.

—Kathy Rudman,
Etna, NH

Paper towel tube secures tongs

In an earlier issue, a reader suggested using a PVC tube to store spring-loaded tongs that don't have clasps. I have an alternative method that doesn't require a trip to the hardware store. Just save the cardboard tube from a roll of paper towels. Cut off about



Score butter sticks before unwrapping them to make measuring easier later.



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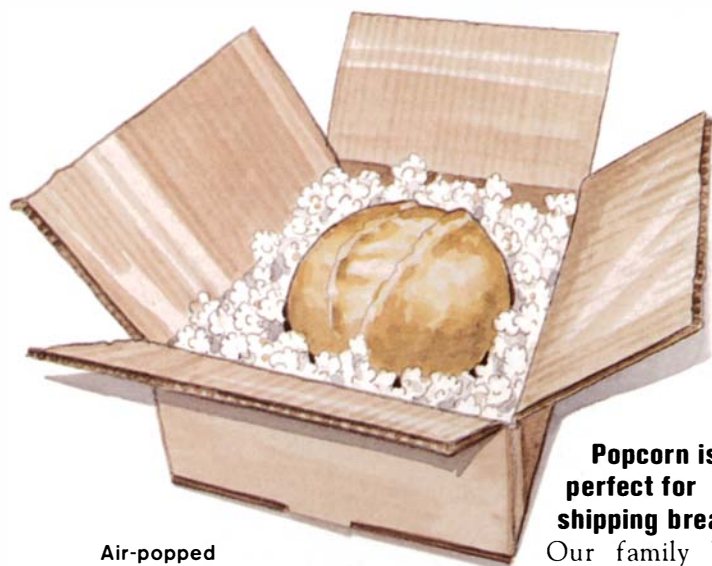



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Popcorn is perfect for shipping bread

Air-popped popcorn keeps homemade bread from getting soggy during shipping.

moment, here's a way to detour the need to soften butter in advance. For recipes that call for beating the sugar with room-temperature butter—cookies, for example—just heat the sugar in the microwave first. Granulated sugar holds heat very well, and it can easily pick up enough heat in the microwave to warm the butter to about room temperature during mixing.

I microwave the sugar just long enough to warm the granules—about two minutes—but not to melt them. Then I proceed with creaming the butter and sugar.

—Linda Lang,
Malvern, PA

Newspaper absorbs odors from plastic

To remove the odor from a plastic container in which I've stored cut onions, I borrow an old trick from my mother. I wash the container and stuff it with a crumpled piece of newspaper. In a few days (with the lid closed), the newspaper has absorbed the odor.

—Eric Feinstein,
Ossining, NY

Our family bakes handmade brick-oven breads for restaurants and grocers in our area, but occasionally we need to send a loaf long-distance. I've found the ideal packing material: popcorn. Surrounding the bread with air-popped corn keeps the crust intact and crisp (plastic wrapping turns it soggy), it keeps the inside moist, and it prevents the bread from taking on a cardboard smell and taste from the packing box.

—Kathleen Weber,
Della Fattoria, Petaluma, CA

Charcoal starter decorates cakes

In a pastry class, my teacher used a hot electric charcoal starter to decorate a layer cake. First she dusted the top

of the cake with confectioners' sugar. Then she made caramelized lines on the cake by touching one side of the red-hot burner to the sugar. Done in both directions, this created a lovely lattice design.

I now use my charcoal starter for this purpose only. One word of caution: The starter gets very hot, so set it on a ceramic tile or hot plate while it's warming up and cooling down.

—Lilia Dvarionas,
Kanata, Ontario

Cork your knives

A knife block or cutlery rack is the best way to store sharp knives. But if you don't have one of these, you can safely



Corks protect the tips of knives if you store them in a drawer.

store knives in a drawer by sticking their sharp points into a cork. The cork protects the knife tip and helps keep the blades from knocking into one another.

—Randy Bard,
Washington, D.C.

Tortilla press rolls out mini tart shells

While I was making miniature tart shells for a party, I discovered a better way to roll out the dough. The recipe said to use my fingers to pat the walnut-size balls of dough into the tart pan, but the rough, uneven texture bothered me; I wanted a thin, crisp crust.

After my rolling pin failed to give me what I wanted, I tried a tortilla press. I cut open the seams of a zip-top bag (plastic wrap was too thin), floured the bag lightly, positioned the dough balls between the floured pieces of the bag, and applied a slow, even pressure. The re-

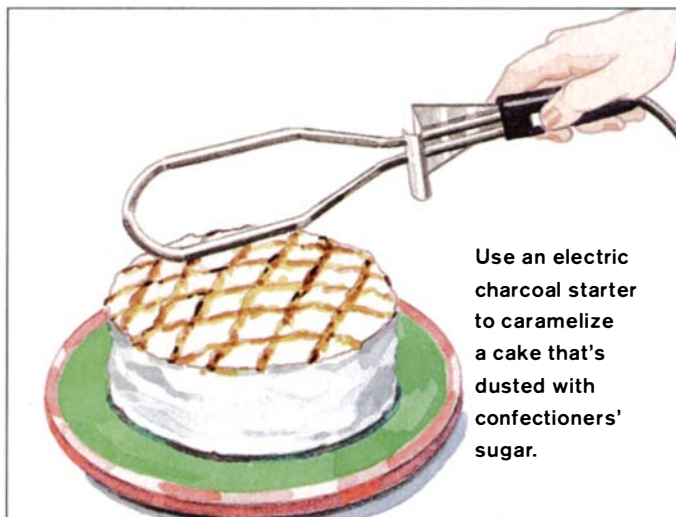
sult was perfect. The dough was thin and manageable, slipping right into my mini tart pan or muffin tin. All the tarts were uniform.

—Mary Hooten,
Richmond, VA

Freeze meat drippings from roasts for Yorkshire pudding anytime

I love Yorkshire pudding, but I don't always have on hand the meat drippings needed to make it. Consequently, whenever I make a roast, I freeze the extra juices and fat in a mini ice-cube tray. Now, anytime I want to cook up a batch of Yorkshire pudding, I just melt a cube of drippings in each muffin cup and proceed as usual.

—R.B. Himes,
Vienna, OH ♦



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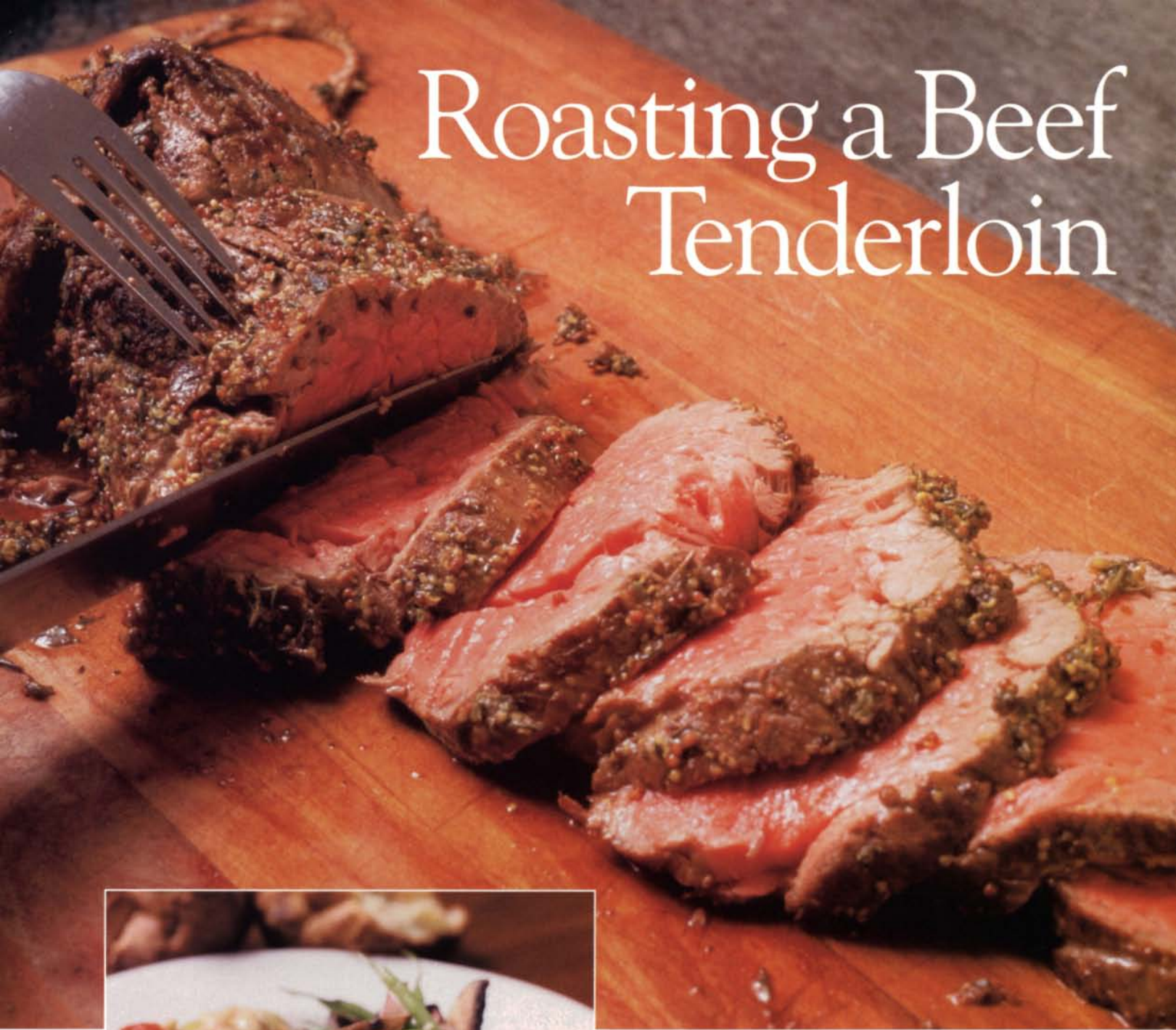


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Roasting a Beef Tenderloin



Vibrant side dishes complete the plate. The author serves garlicky flageolets studded with sweet oven-dried tomatoes and a crisp yet earthy endive and mushroom salad.

A special-occasion cut that's worth every penny when cooked to perfection. No bones make carving this roast a snap.

Four steps—seasoning, searing, coating with mustard, and roasting—produce a juicy roast to star in holiday meals

BY KATHERINE ALFORD

When I cook a beef tenderloin for the holidays, I don't know who's happier with it, me or my guests. I like this big boneless cut because it's easy to portion, straightforward to prepare, and a breeze to carve. My guests love it because it's tender, delicious, and—tenderloin being the cut from which filet mignon comes—a special-occasion treat.

This luxurious, quick-cooking cut is so tender that you can cut it with a butter knife. With that tenderness, however, comes a slight tradeoff in flavor, so I use a couple of techniques to bring out and enhance the meat's mild flavor. After generously salting the meat, I sear it to give it a deeper flavor and dark crust. Then I coat it with a mustard and herb rub before roasting it. That's it. I find beef tenderloin so inherently moist that I don't often bother making a sauce.

Customize your roast and save money by trimming the filet yourself

For the best beef, seek out cuts labeled "prime" by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Prime meat is well marbled, meaning there's fat streaked within the muscle tissue. Marbling makes the meat tender, juicy, and flavorful. Because only about 2 percent of all beef receives this stamp, prime isn't available everywhere. Specialty butcher shops are your best bet, although some grocery chains do carry it. You can also buy prime meat by mail (see Sources, p. 87). But don't despair if you can't find USDA prime. Meat labeled USDA "choice," which is more widely available, will still have the wonderful tenderness

that you expect from a beef tenderloin, and my herb rub will add flavor.

Beef tenderloin, also called beef filet, is an expensive cut. A large, whole, trimmed filet (about 6 pounds) will cost you from \$70 to as much as \$125, depending on its grade, quality, and where you buy it, but it will feed at least ten people with no bones or waste. Buying an untrimmed tenderloin and trimming it yourself can save you \$5 to \$10. But what I like best is that I can use any meat from the trimming—the very thin tail pieces or the meat from the fat-covered "chain" that runs along the cut—for stir-fries and stews. And knowing how to trim my own filet means I don't have to wait in line at the butcher with everyone else waiting for their trimmed roasts. As long as you use a good, sharp knife, trimming a tenderloin yourself doesn't take long and it isn't difficult to do. (To see how, see Basics, p. 74.)

If you do buy a trimmed tenderloin (and some stores charge you the same price whether it's trimmed or not), give it a close look before roasting it. Make sure any excess fat has been trimmed away and that the silverskin—the thin, tough, silvery membrane that runs along the surface of the meat—has been removed completely; if it's still there, remove it as directed on p. 74; otherwise, it will cause the meat to curl as it cooks, and it's tough to chew.

Cut the tenderloin in two for easier handling and tie it for even cooking. A whole tenderloin is a thin piece of meat, but it's quite long, which is why I cut it in half for easier handling. Cooking two smaller roasts also means that I can cook one to 120°F for

MENU



Filet of Beef with Mustard & Herb Crust

Flageolets with Roasted Tomatoes

Roquefort Popovers

Mushroom, Endive & Green Bean Salad



Orange-Soaked Bundt Cake

Turn one whole filet into two small roasts for even cooking



Trim excess fat and slice the filet in half to make two roasts. You can cook one longer for those who like their meat medium.



Tie the roast to keep its shape. If you know how to tie a roast using a continuous piece of string, use that method, but tying snug knots with individual pieces works just as well.



Season your beef with plenty of coarse salt. The roast on the left has its thin end tucked under and tied to even out its shape.



Sear all surfaces of the roasts for great flavor and texture. You can sear right in the roasting pan.

people like me who like their meat rare and the other to 125°F for people who like it more pink than red.

I tie each roast at two-inch intervals (see the photo on p. 33) with kitchen twine or, even better, butcher string, which is thicker. Tying the roast is important because once the silverskin has been removed, the meat tends to flatten and lose its shape. Also, as meat cooks, it tends to twist and curl. Tying results in a more uniformly shaped roast, which will cook more evenly. Tuck a few inches of the thinnest end of one roast under before tying to even out the thickness of the roast (see the photo on p. 33).

Tie the string so that it presses firmly but not tightly against the meat. If it's too loose, the twine will lose its grip as the meat shrinks during cooking,



Brush the mustard-herb mixture generously over the tenderloin. The coating adds flavor that complements the mild taste of the beef.

but if it's too tight, it will bite into the tenderloin, creating uneven bulges and possibly tearing the meat.

Sear first for a flavorful, well-browned crust

I always sear my tenderloin roasts on top of the stove before finishing in a hot oven. Some chefs claim they can get the same dark, caramelized crust on the meat by “oven searing”—starting the roast at a higher heat. But I’ve never been able to get the same rich flavor in the meat and definition in the crust as when I sear tenderloin on the stove. As with any roast, it’s best to have the meat near room temperature before you start to cook, which allows for more accurate cooking time. Take the roast out of the refrigerator about half an hour before you plan to cook it.

Be sure to pat the meat dry before searing it or the surface moisture will interfere with good browning. I sear my roasts right in the roasting pan, but if your pan has a flimsy bottom, you’ll want to do this in a heavy-based skillet and then transfer the roasts to the rack in the roasting pan.

When searing, give each side of the roast—since it’s round, there are three to four “sides”—a few minutes of undisturbed cooking. Resist the temptation to constantly turn the beef from side to side and you’ll be rewarded with a beautifully browned crust.

I rub the meat with the mustard-herb mix after searing it (rather than before) for two reasons: the mustard would introduce moisture to the pan, again interfering with browning, and it would burn. The simple rub adds flavor to the tenderloin without overwhelming the cut’s mild beef taste.

Remove the meat when it reaches 120°F, and let it rest. Cooking a beef tenderloin is almost fool-proof. There are two places where people commonly



Take the meat out of the oven when it reaches 120°F on a meat thermometer. If some of your guests like their meat medium instead of rare, leave one of the roasts in the oven until it registers 125°F.

err: one is overcooking it; the other is not giving it an ample rest. Many cookbooks suggest removing the meat when it reaches 125°F, but I prefer 120°F for a roast that's a perfect medium rare. Keep in mind that carryover heat will continue to cook the meat as it rests, raising the temperature by 10 to 15 degrees.

Let the meat rest in a warm place for at least 15 minutes—longer is fine—before slicing it. The rest equalizes the temperature and gives the meat fibers time to reabsorb the internal juices. Without an ample rest, the juices will rush out when you slice, and your meat will be dry. I don't bother tenting the meat with foil. It stays warm without it, and the wrapping would soften the roast's crust.

Have your side dishes ready to roll

Unlike roasting a turkey, which can take hours, beef filet is ready in less than an hour, so it's important to have your side dishes under control before you even pop the beef into the oven.

One dish that pairs wonderfully with tenderloin and lends itself well to being made ahead is a garlicky ragoût of flageolet beans and sweet oven-dried tomatoes. The flageolets (pronounced fla-zhoh-LAY) play the same role as roasted or mashed potatoes on the plate, but they're an unexpected and delicious accompaniment, especially for people who have had their fill of mashed potatoes over Thanksgiving.

Have the elements of the mushroom, green bean, and endive salad ready to combine: the vinaigrette mixed, the beans blanched, the mushrooms sliced. But don't trim the endive or chop the shallot until you're ready to assemble the salad; the endive discolors quickly once cut, and the shallot oxidizes, making the odor and flavor unpleasantly potent.

The only tricky part of timing the menu concerns the popovers. If you have two ovens, there's no problem; simply bake the popovers at around the same time you cook the meat. But if you have one oven you'll have a choice to make: bake the popovers as the meat rests, which means the meat will be served warm rather than hot, which is still delicious. (Even cold tenderloin is wonderful; try thinly sliced leftovers on crostini with a little horseradish cream.) Or you can bake the popovers before roasting the meat. (You can't do them at the same time because you can't open the oven while the popovers are baking.) The popovers taste delicious even an hour out of the oven, but it's important to poke holes in them to release the steam inside or they'll get soggy. If you want to warm them up, put them back in the hot but turned off oven for a few minutes.

Finally, the orange-flavored bundt cake I make for dessert is actually better if made a couple of days ahead. The orange juice and rum soak into the cake, making it incredibly moist and full of flavor.

RECIPES

Roasted Filet of Beef with Whole-Grain Mustard & Herb Crust

If you have a heavy-duty roasting pan, sear the filets right in the pan on the stove. Otherwise, use a large, heavy-based skillet. *Serves ten.*

¼ cup whole-grain mustard
3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
1 Tbs. dried savory, finely crumbled
1 Tbs. dried thyme, finely crumbled
1 whole filet of beef (7 to 8 lb. untrimmed or 5 to 6 lb. trimmed)
Vegetable oil for sautéing
Coarse salt
Freshly ground black pepper

In a small bowl, mix together the mustard, olive oil, savory, and thyme.

Trim the meat of all excess fat and silverskin (see the illustrations on p. 74). Cut the filet in half to make two equal pieces about 7 inches long. You'll have one piece with the broad double-pieced butt portion and a thinner piece that tapers to a small tip. Tuck the tapered tip under and tie with twine to fashion two equally thick roasts. Tie each roast at 2-inch intervals.

Heat the oven to 450°F. Heat a heavy-duty roasting pan or large Dutch oven or skillet over medium-high heat. Pour in enough vegetable oil to just cover the bottom of the pan. Pat the filets dry, salt them generously, and lay them in the pan; cook without disturbing them until the bottoms are a rich brown. Turn the beef and sear the other sides. It will take about 4 min. per side (there are three or four sides per roast) to get a good sear. When the filets are seared, transfer them to a cutting board, brush them with the mustard and herb mix, and then generously grind fresh pepper over them. Put a rack in the roasting pan, lay the meat on



Poke the popovers to keep them crispy. The holes let the steam escape, which would otherwise collect inside the popovers and make them soggy.

the rack, and roast until the internal temperature reaches 120°F for medium rare, about 20 min. (Check after 15 min.; roasting time will vary depending on searing time.) Remove the filets from the oven and let them rest in a warm spot for at least 15 min. before slicing. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Flageolet Beans with Slow-Roasted Tomatoes

Flageolets are tiny, tender French beans. Delicate in flavor, they range from creamy white to light green. If you can't find them, try navy beans instead. The slow-roasted tomatoes will last in the fridge for up to five days; cover them with olive oil (add some sprigs of thyme or rosemary and a clove of garlic, if you like) and they'll keep up to two weeks. *Serves ten.*

FOR THE TOMATOES:

2 lb. ripe plum tomatoes
1 tsp. coarse salt

FOR THE BEANS:

1 lb. dried flageolet beans, soaked at least 6 hours
1 carrot, peeled and cut in half
1 small yellow onion, peeled and cut in half
2 bay leaves
4 sprigs fresh flat-leaf parsley
6 sprigs fresh thyme
Coarse salt
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
3 large cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 ribs celery, thinly sliced

For the tomatoes—Heat the oven to 250°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment or foil. Core the tomatoes and cut them in half lengthwise. Put them on the baking sheet, cut side up, and sprinkle with the salt. Bake the tomatoes until they look dry but are still slightly plump and not leathery, 4 to 6 hours, depending on their size. Cut any large pieces in half.

For the beans—Drain the soaking beans and put them in a large pot along with the carrot, onion, and bay leaves. Tie the parsley and thyme together and add them to the pot. Add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer. Cover and cook until tender, about 2 hours. Check that the beans stay covered with liquid, adding more if needed. When the beans are tender, add the salt. (The beans can be cooked up to 2 days ahead. Remove the carrot, onion, herbs, and bay leaves and refrigerate the beans in their liquid.)

In a Dutch oven or high-sided skillet, heat the olive oil over medium. When the oil is hot, add the garlic and cook for about 1 min. Add the celery and cook until softened slightly, about 2 min. Drain the beans, reserving their cooking liquid. Add the beans and 2 cups of the cooking liquid to the celery and garlic. Add the slow-roasted tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer and cook for 2 to 3 min. (At this point, the dish can be covered and held up to an hour at room temperature.)

Roquefort Popovers

After much trial and error, I've come to the conclusion that for the best results, a popover pan is a must. Bor-



Endive adds beauty as well as crunch to this bean and mushroom salad. Arrange the whole leaves around the platter and pile the tossed salad on top.

row or buy a couple—preferably nonstick. You may not use them often, but you'll be happy you have them when you need them. You can easily halve this recipe. *Yields 12 popovers.*

Vegetable oil, shortening, or lard for the pans

1½ cups whole milk
6 oz. Roquefort cheese, crumbled
1 tsp. salt
Freshly ground black pepper
9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour
6 large eggs

Set the oven rack to its lowest position in the oven. Heat the oven to 400°F. Generously grease 12 popover tins (preferably nonstick) with oil, shortening, or lard (butter won't work).

In a small saucepan, warm the milk and cheese over medium-low heat until the cheese is melted. Remove from the heat and whisk in the salt and pepper. (You can also melt the cheese in the milk in a glass measuring cup in the microwave on low power for 1 min.)

Put the flour in a medium bowl. Whisk in the milk mixture until just combined; it's fine if the batter is a bit lumpy. Add the eggs one at a time to the batter, whisking well after each addition. Pour the batter into the prepared tins and bake on the lowest shelf for 20 min. at 400°F. Don't open the oven, but reduce the temperature to 350°F and continue to bake another 15 min. until the popovers are browned and fully puffed. Remove the popovers from the oven and immediately take them out of the tin to keep them from getting soggy. Poke each popover with a knife to release steam. Serve immediately or reheat just before serving.

Mushroom, Endive & Green Bean Salad with Truffle Oil Vinaigrette

Slender *haricots verts* are best for this salad. If you can only find regular green beans, slice them thinly. The truffle oil really makes this salad special; see p. 87 for sources. Walnut oil or a good olive oil would make a fine substitution. *Serves ten.*

2 tsp. Dijon-style mustard
2 Tbs. white-wine vinegar
2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves, minced
1 tsp. coarse salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
6 Tbs. truffle oil
1 lb. green beans (preferably *haricots verts*),
trimmed, blanched until tender but not soft, and
refreshed in ice water
1 lb. cremini or button mushrooms, trimmed and
thinly sliced
1 medium shallot, finely chopped (about 2 Tbs.)
1 head Belgian endive, trimmed, outer leaves sep-
arated and reserved, inner leaves sliced crosswise

In a small bowl, whisk together the mustard, vinegar, thyme, salt, and pepper. Slowly whisk in the truffle oil to make a creamy, emulsified dressing; set aside.

In a large bowl, toss the blanched beans, mushrooms, shallot, and sliced endive with the vinaigrette. To serve, line a platter with the whole endive leaves and mound the salad over them.

Orange-Soaked Bundt Cake

This amazingly moist and delicious cake is adapted from a favorite family recipe of Bianca Henry, a New York pastry instructor. You'll need a thin skewer to poke holes in the cake. Serve the cake garnished with slices of peeled oranges macerated with a little sugar and rum. *Serves ten.*

FOR THE CAKE:

10 oz. (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour; more for the pan
2 cups sugar
1½ tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened;
more for the pan
¾ cup canola or other mild-flavored oil (check for
freshness before using)

1½ Tbs. finely minced lemon zest (from about
2 lemons)
1 Tbs. vanilla extract
¾ cup strained fresh orange juice
5 large eggs

FOR THE SYRUP & GLAZE:

½ cup frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
1 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted
2 Tbs. dark rum
1 cup confectioners' sugar, divided

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 10-inch tube pan or 12-cup bundt pan.

To make the cake—Sift the flour, sugar, baking powder, and soda into the large bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Add the butter and mix on low speed until fine crumbs form. Change to the whisk attachment. With the machine running on medium speed, whisk in the oil, lemon zest, vanilla extract, and orange juice. Whisk in the eggs one at a time and then increase the speed to high and whisk the batter until light, about 3 min., scraping the sides of the bowl if necessary. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake until a toothpick inserted in the cake comes out clean, 45 to 50 min.

To make the syrup and glaze—While the cake bakes, whisk together in a small bowl the orange juice concentrate, butter, rum, and ½ cup of the confectioners' sugar. When the cake is done, set the pan on a rack to cool for 5 min. With a thin skewer, poke the cake all the way through to the bottom of the pan in about 100 places. Pour ⅓ cup of the syrup over the cake and let stand for 1 hour before removing the cake from the pan. (At this point you can wrap the cake in plastic and hold for up to 3 days at room temperature; in fact, the flavor only improves.) Cover the remaining syrup with plastic and store at room temperature.

When ready to serve, whisk the remaining ½ cup confectioners' sugar into the remaining syrup. Set the cake on a rack over a baking sheet and pour the glaze over the cake. Let stand for at least 10 min. before slicing and serving.

Katherine Alford, former director of instruction at Peter Kump's Cooking School, is opening her own cooking school in New York City. ♦



Poke 100 holes in the cake and then fill them up again with a tangy-sweet orange syrup.



This simple cake packs a ton of orange flavor.



Try a fruity, peppery red for beef tenderloin

Beef cries out for red, and those who heed the call have plenty of choices. Lockwood, a California Merlot, is big enough for the seared beef, with plenty of fruit to play off the mustard and herbs. Australian Shiraz would be good, too. Try Penfolds and Linde-

mans; both have a smooth oak finish and lively black-pepper flavors. All these reds are no more than \$15 per bottle. If you want to splurge a little, try a Pomerol like Château de Sales (about \$25) or a St. Emilion like Château Simard (about \$20).

Both of these Bordeaux have good tannins and lots of fruit, which are excellent partners for tenderloin.

For sweet sipping with the orange bundt cake, stash a bottle of late-harvest Riesling in the fridge. Greenwood Ridge from Mendocino has

delicious dried peach and honey notes that would be lovely with the buttery cake's orange-rum flavors.

Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about wine and food pairing in the San Francisco Bay area.



Bold flavorings like onions keep bread puddings from being too mild-mannered.



The quality of the bread makes all the difference, so use a loaf with lots of flavor. Challah (above) would add eggy richness, while a sourdough would give a heartier result.

Savory Bread Puddings

Mix dried bread, a well-seasoned custard, and hearty ingredients for a terrific main or side dish

**BY SARA CORPENING,
MARY CORPENING BARBER
& LORI LYN NARLOCK**

Bread pudding is comfort food at its best, and a savory version is the perfect replacement for a typical starch. We love savory bread puddings because they're as satisfying as any potato dish, and as versatile as pasta. They're also easy to prepare. If you've never made one, you might envision something very eggy (and therefore delicate) like a quiche or a frittata, but a savory bread pudding, at least to our minds, is much more like a stuffing, with the custard acting more as a binder than a filler.

A great savory bread pudding starts with top-quality ingredients

A savory bread pudding is a mix of cubes of stale bread, a well-seasoned custard, and hearty ingredients such as roasted or sautéed vegetables and good cheeses, all spread into a buttered dish and baked. The elements are basic, but a few guidelines will help guarantee a satisfying dish.

The bread determines the result. The bread puddings with the most interesting texture and flavor start with top-quality bread. The good news is that you can use the remains of that big sourdough *boule* you bought yesterday but didn't finish. By now



A savory custard binds and moistens. Experiment with different liquids—milk, cream, *crème fraîche*, sour cream, even rich stock.



Give the bread time to absorb the custard and soften into a pudding.

it's a bit stale and dry—perfect for bread pudding. But if you really want to make a savory bread pudding and you don't have leftovers, you can easily turn fresh bread “stale” simply by baking it until most of the moisture has evaporated. Feel free to experiment with the types of bread you use: try an herb bread or olive loaf.

A flavorful custard holds a bread pudding together but doesn't make it soggy. When making custard for bread puddings, a good ratio to start with is one whole large egg and two large egg yolks to every cup of milk or cream. But you'll notice that we've varied the amount of eggs slightly in the following recipes, depending on the other ingredients. We know the custards in these puddings will gain an extra measure of stability from binding with the bread they're mixed with.

To change and enhance the flavors in our custards, we like to vary the choice of dairy product—sour cream, *crème fraîche*, milk, or cream are all good options. We always season our custards well with salt, pepper, and fresh herbs. You'll also notice that custard isn't the only liquid in a bread pudding. We include a little extra liquid (like stock or wine) in the mix to ensure that the pudding stays moist and to add another dimension of flavor. Even with the extra liquid, our puddings bake up very firm, not soggy.

By varying ingredients, you can change the character of a bread pudding. To give bread pud-

ding a main-dish feel, include some cooked seafood, smoked poultry, or even pork sausage, as we do in our roasted fennel and apple version. (Just be sure any ingredients like shrimp, sausage, or chicken are fully cooked before adding them.) For a side dish, you can keep your list of ingredients short, and choose those that provide a balance of flavors. Our recipes use some of our favorite winter flavors: one combines caramelized onions, roasted garlic, and rosemary; another mixes wild mushrooms and a rich cheese. Once you've tried these recipes, experiment with your own.

Choose a sturdy baking dish, assemble, and bake when you want

One of the pure joys of cooking is pulling a heavy baking dish from the shelf and feeling its weight in your hands. This pleasure has a sound purpose when baking a bread pudding. A sturdy baking dish helps distribute heat evenly and gently to the pudding. We like to use a thick ceramic casserole or baking dish with high sides. A soufflé dish, a cast-iron skillet, or a heavy ovenproof glass dish with a capacity of at least two quarts will also work beautifully. For individual puddings, ramekins with an 8-ounce capacity work equally well (just reduce the cooking time by 10 minutes). It's important to lightly coat the dish with a fat: brush on butter, bacon, or sausage drippings, or spray vegetable oil on the bottom and sides. If a pan is prepared well, you can unmold the bread

pudding from the dish, set it on a platter, and slice it into servings at the table. But often we like to serve the pudding right from the baking dish, using a large spoon or a metal spatula.

Bread puddings are quick to assemble and can be prepared ahead. You'll need to spend a little time preparing your ingredients for bread puddings: cutting bread, slicing onions, maybe a little sautéing. But the next step—assembling the puddings—is fast, and you can even do this hours before you plan to serve the dish. Just cover and refrigerate for a few hours or overnight and bake just before serving. Or prepare the pudding and bake it right away.

Savory bread puddings taste best warm (give them a 15- to 20-minute rest before serving), but even at room temperature, they're wonderful. Leftovers reheat well in a hot oven or the microwave.

RECIPES

Oven-Dried Bread

Good-quality peasant, sourdough, or other hearty bread, sliced ¾ inch thick

Heat the oven to 300°F. Spread the bread slices directly on the oven rack and bake until crisp all the way through (most of the moisture in the bread will be evaporated) and lightly browned, about 15 min.

Wild Mushroom Bread Pudding with Cambozola Cheese

This hearty combination of mushrooms and onions with rich Cambozola cheese (a blue-Brie hybrid) is a perfect complement to beef. If you can't find Cambozola, try a blue like Gorgonzola instead. *In a baking dish, serves eight to ten, or fills eight 1-cup ramekins.*

3 Tbs. plus 2 tsp. butter
2 cups chopped onions (about 2 large)
1½ lb. mushrooms (mix of shiitake caps and creminis), sliced
1½ tsp. coarse salt
¾ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 tsp. dried marjoram
½ cup Madeira
1 can rich beef broth (10½ oz.)
1 cup heavy cream or crème fraîche
2 eggs
2 egg yolks
1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
9 oz. peasant or hearty whole-wheat bread, stale or oven-dried (see recipe at left), cut into ¾-inch cubes (about 6 cups)
8 oz. Cambozola cheese (rind trimmed), cut into ½-inch pieces

Heat 1 Tbs. of the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onions and season with a little salt and pepper; cook until tender, 5 to 7 min. Remove the onions and set aside. In the same skillet, heat another 1 Tbs. butter. Add half of the mushrooms and season with ¼ tsp. marjoram, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Cook over high heat until the mushrooms are browned and all the liquid has evaporated, 5 to 7 min. Set aside with the onions. Repeat with the remaining mushrooms, using another 1 Tbs. butter and seasoning again with ¼ tsp. marjoram, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper. When the mushrooms are brown, add the first batch of cooked mushrooms and the onions back into the skillet. Add the Madeira. Cook, stirring frequently, over high heat until the liquid



You can bake individual puddings in ramekins.

Try these wild mushroom ones with roast beef.

evaporates and the mixture is a rich brown, about 5 min. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool.

Heat the oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, whisk together the broth, cream, eggs, egg yolks, thyme, and the remaining ½ tsp. marjoram, ½ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper. Add the bread and the mushroom mixture to the custard; toss. Let sit for 30 min., stirring occasionally, to saturate the bread. Gently stir in the cheese.

Brush a 2-qt. (or 9x13-inch) baking dish evenly with the remaining 2 tsp. butter. Pour the bread mixture into the baking dish, distributing the ingredients evenly. Bake in the hot oven until lightly browned and firm, 40 to 45 min. (Alternatively, butter eight 1-cup ramekins and divide the bread mixture among them. Bake until lightly browned and firm, 30 to 35 min.)

Caramelized Onion & Roasted Garlic Bread Pudding

This pudding is a perfect side dish for roast chicken. We like the texture and slightly sweet flavor of challah bread for this pudding, but you can substitute a hearty peasant loaf. *Serves eight to ten.*

FOR THE ROASTED GARLIC:

3 large heads garlic, top one-quarter cut off
3 Tbs. vegetable oil

FOR THE CARAMELIZED ONIONS:

3 Tbs. olive oil
3 large onions, thinly sliced
½ tsp. coarse salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
3 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. red-wine vinegar
2 tsp. sugar

FOR THE BREAD PUDDING:

2½ cups heavy cream
2 eggs
2 egg yolks
2 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
9 oz. peasant or challah bread, stale or oven-dried (see recipe at left), cut into ¾-inch cubes (about 6 cups)



Challah bread adds character to this caramelized onion and roasted garlic bread pudding.

1½ tsp. coarse salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 tsp. butter, softened or melted, for brushing

To roast the garlic—Heat the oven to 350°F. Put the garlic in a small shallow baking dish, pour the vegetable oil over it, and cover with foil. Bake until the garlic is browned and soft, 50 to 60 min. Let cool. Pick or squeeze the pulp out of the garlic cloves and purée the pulp in a food processor; you should have about ⅓ cup. The purée can be made ahead of time and refrigerated until ready to use.

To cook the onions—Heat the olive oil in a large nonstick skillet over high heat. When the oil is hot but not smoking, reduce the heat to medium and add the onions, salt, and pepper. Cook until the onions become soft and golden, 30 to 40 min. Add the vinegar and sugar; cook until the liquid is absorbed, about 3 min.; you should have about 1½ cups. The onions can be made ahead of time and refrigerated until ready to use.

To make the pudding—Heat the oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, whisk together the cream, eggs, egg yolks, roasted garlic, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Stir in the caramelized onions and the bread. Let sit for 30 min. to saturate the bread, stirring occasionally.

Brush a 2-qt. (or 9x13-inch) baking dish evenly with the butter. Pour the bread mixture into the baking dish, distributing the ingredients evenly. Bake in the hot oven until lightly browned and firm, 40 to 45 min.

Roasted Fennel, Sausage & Apple Bread Pudding

This savory combination of autumn ingredients makes a terrific side dish for turkey, or it can be a delicious supper or brunch on its own. *Serves eight to ten.*

8 cups thinly sliced fennel (about 4 medium bulbs)
4 Tbs. olive oil
1¼ tsp. coarse salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
½ lb. sweet Italian sausage, casing removed



A roasted fennel, sausage, and apple bread pudding has all the ingredients to make a complete main dish. Serve it with a mixed green salad.

2 Tbs. butter (to use only if sausage yields no drippings) plus 2 tsp. for coating the baking dish
1 large Granny Smith apple, cored and cut into ½-inch wedges
2 cups sour cream
¼ cup apple cider
3 eggs
2 egg yolks
1 Tbs. chopped fresh sage
9 oz. peasant or sourdough bread, stale or oven-dried (see recipe opposite), cut into ¾-inch cubes (about 6 cups)

Heat the oven to 425°F. Toss the fennel with 3 Tbs. of the oil and season with ½ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper. Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment or foil. Spread the fennel mixture over the baking sheet. Bake until the fennel is soft and caramelized, turning once, about 30 to 35 min. Remove from the oven and reduce the oven temperature to 350°F.

Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 Tbs. oil in a medium nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Crumble the sausage into the skillet and cook until browned, stirring occasionally, 5 to 7 min. Transfer the sausage to a large bowl with a slotted spoon. Reserve 2 Tbs. of the drippings. (If there are no drippings, substitute 2 Tbs. butter).

Heat the 2 Tbs. drippings or butter in the same skillet over medium heat. Add the apple and season with a little salt and pepper. Cook until the apple is tender and golden brown on both sides, 5 to 7 min. Remove, add to the sausage; mix in the roasted fennel.

In a large bowl, whisk together the sour cream, apple cider, eggs, egg yolks, sage, and the remaining ¾ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper. Fold in the bread and the sausage mixture. Let sit for 30 min., stirring occasionally, to saturate the bread.

Brush a 2-qt. (or 9x13-inch) baking dish evenly with the remaining 2 tsp. butter. Pour the bread mixture into the baking dish, distributing the ingredients evenly. Bake in the hot oven until lightly browned and firm, 40 to 45 min.

Mary Corpening Barber and Sara Corpening run their catering business, *Thymes Two*, in San Francisco. They have collaborated with Lori Lyn Narlock, a food and wine writer from Napa Valley, on three cookbooks. ♦

How to Make the Crispest

Mom's secrets: one onion for every two potatoes and a horizontal position in the food processor

BY MITCHELL & CARRIE DAVIS

Every year, we look forward to December, which brings with it some wonderful and delicious traditions. We dust off the menorah, fetch the dreidl from the closet, and recall the story of Hanukkah. The Jews, returning to their desecrated temple after a long battle, found that there was only enough oil for one day of light. Amazingly, the oil lasted eight days. To celebrate the miracle, Jews today light candles, play games, and eat foods fried in oil: fritters, doughnuts, and—our favorite—potato pancakes, called latkes.

Although you may not believe in miracles, you will become a believer in the miraculous formula that our mother, Sondra, uses to make her award-winning potato latkes: one onion for every two potatoes. The result is so good that when we made latkes from her recipe, we took top honors at the first annual James Beard Foundation Latke Cookoff in 1995. (You didn't know there was a latke cookoff, did you?)

But the onion-to-potato ratio is only one secret to making terrific latkes (pronounced LAHT-kuhs). Many people swear that grating the potatoes by hand produces the best pancakes. We find, however, that using the shredding disk of a food processor and positioning the potatoes horizontally in the feed tube to produce long, thin strands (similar to a fine julienne) gives the latkes a better texture—crispy on the outside and soft on the inside. We also prefer frying the latkes in peanut oil, rather than canola or corn oil, because it gives the finished latke a lighter, cleaner flavor. Be sure to use very fresh oil.

Because grated potatoes turn brown quickly, and because latkes are best eaten right away, plan to begin this recipe just before you intend to serve the latkes. If you like, you can get a head start by peeling (but



Lay the potatoes flat in the feed tube to get long strands. Grating an onion on top helps to slow browning.



A chance to vent any pent-up emotions. Wrap the grated potato and onion mixture in a dishtowel and wring out as much liquid as you can.

not grating) the potatoes and onions a few hours in advance. Submerge the potatoes in cold water and keep them in the refrigerator until ready to use.

At our mother's house, potato latkes are always served hot out of the pan with sour cream and homemade applesauce. They're substantial enough to eat on their own, or you can serve them as an accompaniment to pot roast or other braised meats. Miniature latkes make great hors d'oeuvres.

Mitchell and Carrie Davis will light candles and fry latkes this year at their mother's home in Toronto.

Potato Latkes

RECIPES

Potato Latkes

Look for matzo meal in the Jewish section of the grocery store. If you don't have a food processor, grate the potatoes on the largest holes of a box grater, holding the potatoes vertically to get long strands. *Yields eight to ten 3- to 4-inch latkes.*

4 medium to large russet or Yukon Gold potatoes (2 lb. total), peeled
2 large yellow onions (¾ lb. total)
4 large eggs, lightly beaten
½ cup matzo meal
2 tsp. salt; more to taste
10 to 15 grinds black pepper; more to taste
About ¾ cup peanut oil

Using the medium shredding blade of a food processor, grate the potatoes, laying them horizontally in the feed tube to maximize the strand length. Grate the onions (halve or quarter them first if necessary) on top of the potatoes. The onions will turn to mush, and their juices will help keep the potatoes from turning brown. Pick out any ungrated pieces of potato or onion.

Lay a clean dishtowel inside a large bowl and transfer the grated mixture into the towel. Roll the towel



Pat the mixture into a loose pancake, leaving a few rough strands of potato around the edges.

Carefully place the latke into the hot oil. Flip the latkes only once so they don't absorb excess oil.



lengthwise and wring out as much liquid as possible (you can do this over the bowl, discarding the liquid, or right over the sink). Depending on the size of the towel (and your muscles), you may have to do this in batches.

Transfer the grated mixture to a mixing bowl. Add the eggs, matzo meal, salt, and pepper; mix well.

In a large cast-iron or nonstick skillet, pour about ⅛ inch of oil and heat on medium high. The oil is hot enough when a piece of potato sizzles when added. Form a trial latke with a tablespoon of the mixture. Fry until golden brown on both sides. Taste and, if needed, add salt and pepper to the potato mixture.

To form the latkes, scoop up about ½ cup of the mixture with your hands and loosely pat it into a pancake about ½ inch thick, leaving a few straggly strands along the edge. (As you work, liquid will accumulate in the bowl, so lightly squeeze out the excess. The last couple of latkes may need a really firm squeeze.) After shaping each latke, slip it into the hot oil and flatten it gently with the back of a spatula. Fry until deep golden brown, at least 5 min. on each side to be sure the center is fully cooked. If the edges darken very quickly, lower the heat. To prevent excess oil absorption, flip each latke only once. Add oil between batches as needed, making sure the oil heats up again before frying more latkes. Drain the latkes on paper towels or a clean brown paper bag. Serve immediately with applesauce and sour cream.

Latkes are best served right away, but you can reheat leftovers in a 300°F oven. Set the latkes directly on the oven rack (to ensure that air circulates around their entire surface, keeping them crisp) and bake until hot, 8 to 10 min. ♦



Perfectly fried latkes are crisp outside, soft inside. Serve right away.

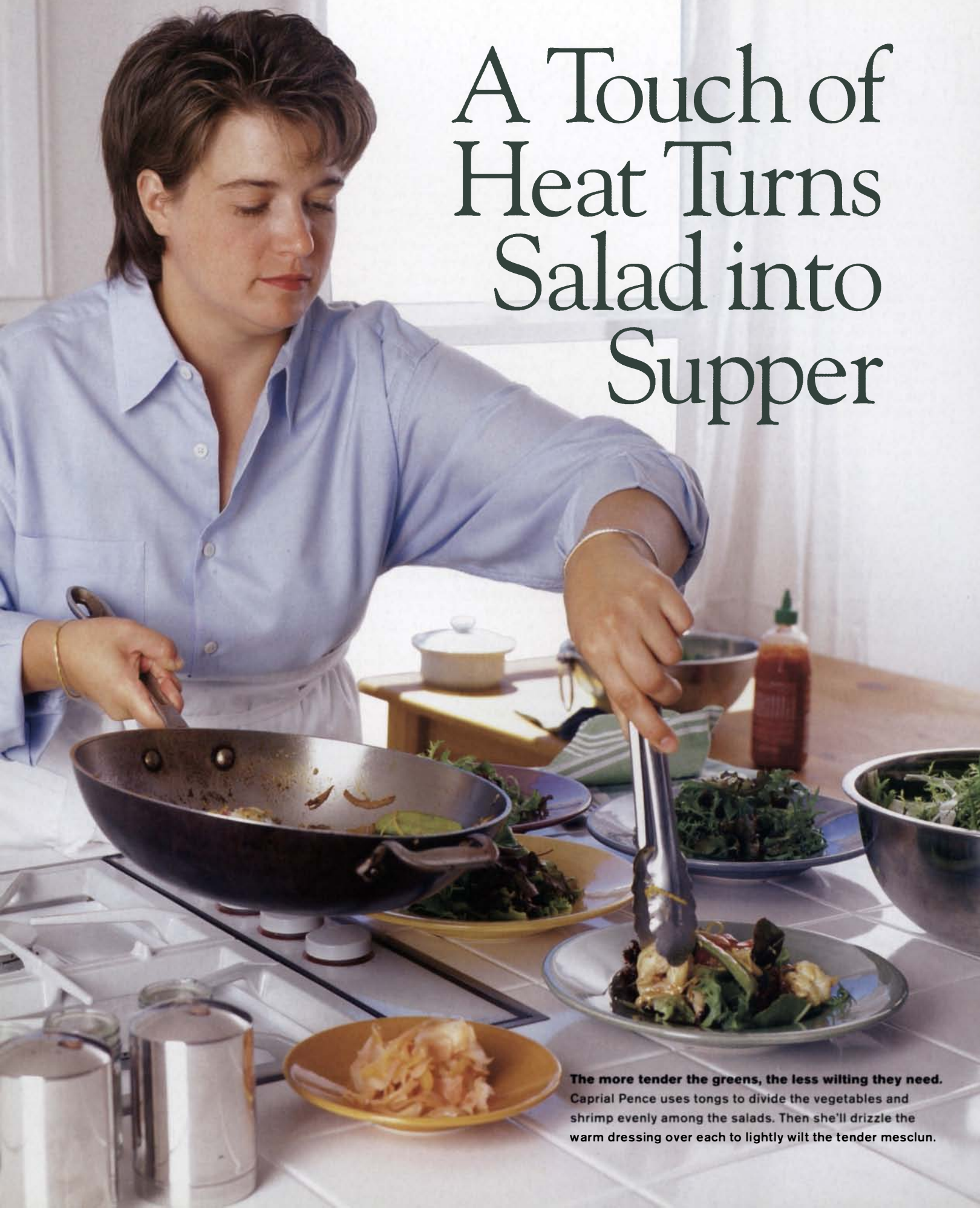
Applesauce

For a smoother texture, cook the apples whole and unpeeled, and then pass them through a food mill after cooking. *Yields 2¼ cups.*

5 or 6 cooking apples, peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch pieces
2 Tbs. water
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
2 Tbs. sugar (optional)
Juice of ½ lemon

Put all the ingredients in a medium saucepan, cover, and set over low heat. Simmer until the apples are soft, 20 to 25 min. Mash with a fork until the mixture is a chunky purée. Cool.

A Touch of Heat Turns Salad into Supper



The more tender the greens, the less wilting they need. Caprial Pence uses tongs to divide the vegetables and shrimp evenly among the salads. Then she'll drizzle the warm dressing over each to lightly wilt the tender mesclun.

Once you learn to wilt the greens successfully, you can improvise a warm salad with your own ingredients

BY CAPRIAL PENCE

When you think of your favorite winter dishes, you may not think of salad, but I do. Not salad as in “cool, crisp greens and ripe tomatoes,” however. If you choose heartier ingredients and give them all the right touch of heat, that summer standard can become a warming winter dinner.

Toss out any memory of overcooked, withered spinach salads adorned with hard-boiled egg and bacon. The kinds of warm salad I’m talking about are filled with delicious flavors and appealing textures. I think the first key to great warm salads lies in the method—learning to barely wilt the greens so that the warm vinaigrette brings all the flavors together but doesn’t make the salad soggy. The second key lies in the ingredients—bold but complementary flavors, with plenty of textural contrast.

Imagine warm, tangy dressings drizzled over sharp and tender greens, tossed with crunchy roasted nuts and rich, pungent cheese. Then imagine that salad topped with sautéed shrimp, roasted chicken or pork, or even roasted vegetables, and you’ll see how satisfying a “warm” salad in winter can be.

The right technique separates a good warm salad from a bad one

Once you understand the basic techniques for preparing a warm salad, you’ll be able to create your own versions that feature your favorite ingredients or just those you have on hand.

Start with cool, crisp greens, and just wilt them slightly. When a dressing is warm, it has a more pronounced flavor than when it’s cold, plus the heat really brings out all the flavors of the salad. You have to be careful when you dress the greens, though, because you want them to be just *slightly* wilted. I suggest a few different ways to do this.

The first method I like is to combine the greens and toppings with the unheated dressing in a stainless-steel mixing bowl, and then hold the bowl over a burner and toss the salad until the greens just begin to wilt. If you don’t have a stainless-steel mixing bowl, another good method is to heat your dressing in a pan. You can add the dressing to whatever you might be sautéing, such as shrimp or chicken, or heat it alone. Then simply pour the warm vinaigrette

over the bowl of greens, add the garnishes, and toss. These methods work well with hardier greens like spinach, escarole, and kale. You can wilt mesclun this way, too; just dress the greens a little more lightly and serve them immediately. Or you can arrange the raw greens on serving plates, top with the warm shrimp or chicken you’ve just cooked, and then drizzle the hot dressing over all. I use this method when the greens are particularly tender, like mizuna or mesclun.

Whichever wilting method you choose, just remember you don’t want to fully cook the greens, so don’t put them directly into a hot sauté pan. And don’t wilt the greens until you’re ready to serve them; these salads look and taste best when freshly dressed.

Complementary flavors and contrasting textures make the best toppings

When I want to prepare a warm salad, I first consider the individual elements—the greens, the dressing, the toppings—and how they work as a whole. Are the flavors complementary? Is there enough contrast in texture, color, and flavor?

Choose the right greens. For warm salads, try using a combination of bitter and mild greens for a

An orange-ginger dressing adds an Asian note to this main-dish salad of sautéed shrimp and vegetables.



nice balance. For example, too much strongly flavored kale can overpower a salad, but incorporating spinach balances it nicely.

- ◆ Buy the freshest looking greens. If the recipe calls for mizuna, but it looks past its prime in the market, substitute other greens, like mesclun or arugula.

- ◆ Be sure the greens are very dry before you use them so that the dressing clings to the leaves and doesn't get diluted. You can wash them several hours ahead of time; they'll keep well if you spin them dry, put them in a bowl covered with a damp paper towel, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate.

- ◆ Match your greens to your dressing. Sturdy greens go best with something hearty, while more tender varieties need a light, delicate dressing that won't weigh them down.

- ◆ Experiment with different greens. Spinach, frisée, escarole, mustard greens, and kale are all available this time of year, and mesclun mixes seem to fill the produce bins year-round. Buy the smallest leaves of kale and mustard that you can find; they'll be more tender. Or slice bigger leaves into ribbons.

Be flexible with your dressings. Try using various combinations of vinegars and oils. Keep a variety on hand: extra-virgin olive and vegetable oils; red-wine, balsamic, sherry, and rice vinegars. Experiment with nut oils like hazelnut or walnut, or herb-infused oils and vinegars. Remember that any basic salad dressing uses one part vinegar to three parts oil.

For warm salad toppings, the possibilities are wide open. Your salad can take on any personality when you consider all the different ingredients you can toss with those greens and the dressing. For the



A grating of Parmesan tops a terrific combination of roasted vegetables, spinach, escarole, and an herb and sherry vinegar dressing.

Three methods to slightly



Wilt hardy greens like spinach before plating the salad. Pour warm dressing over the greens, toss, and divide into servings.

main source of protein, some of my favorites are roast chicken or pork tenderloin, or roasted fall vegetables such as butternut squash, turnips, yams, and shallots. Two other favorite toppings are stir-fried shrimp and vegetables and a sautéed assortment of wild mushrooms.

To make sure I've got plenty of crunch in my salads, I love to include toasted nuts such as almonds, hazelnuts, pecans, walnuts, pine nuts, and—especially for Asian-inspired salads—cashews and peanuts. Cheeses like Gorgonzola, feta, goat cheese, or any good aged grating cheese make great additions (except to salads with Asian flavors), giving a rich, salty balance to sweet and sharp flavors in the salads. Other additions for texture and flavor can include dried fruit like cherries or cranberries, or beans like cannellini or chickpeas.

Just use your instincts. Sure, following the recipe is fine, but improvisation, prompted by a spark of inspiration or just an inventory of your refrigerator, is a natural for warm salads.

Warm salads make perfect one-dish dinners, served with just a loaf of hearty bread and a glass of wine. They're easy enough for busy weeknights, when I like to cook without a lot of extravagance, but I really like them for casual entertaining, too, because I can prepare all the ingredients in advance. The only time I have to spend in the kitchen away from my guests is when I toss the salad together, just a few minutes before we gather at the table.

wilt the salad greens



Wilt more delicate greens after assembling the salad. Drizzle on a warm dressing; serve immediately.



Or mix the greens and dressing and heat over a burner. Use a stainless-steel bowl and toss the greens and dressing with tongs until *just wilted*.

RECIPES

Roasted Vegetable Salad with Sherry Dressing

This is a delicious way to make a meal out of fall vegetables. *Serves four.*

FOR THE VEGETABLES:

- 2 Tbs. vegetable oil
- 6 cloves garlic, quartered
- 1 small onion, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 small carrots, cut into ½-inch chunks
- 2 medium Yukon Gold potatoes (6 oz. each), peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks
- 1 small sweet potato (6 oz.), peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks
- 1 small celery root (8 oz.), peeled and cut into ½-inch chunks
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SALAD AND DRESSING:

- ½ lb. hardy greens (spinach, baby kale, or escarole), stemmed if necessary
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh marjoram
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh sage
- ¼ cup sherry vinegar
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- About 1 oz. shaved or grated Parmesan cheese

To roast the vegetables—Heat the oven to 425°F. In a large bowl, toss the oil, garlic, onion, carrots, potatoes, sweet potato, celery root, salt, and pepper to coat the vegetables well. Spread them out in one layer on rimmed baking sheets and roast, stirring frequently, until tender and brown, 25 to 30 min.

To make the salad and dressing—When the vegetables are almost finished, put the greens in a large stainless-steel mixing bowl; set aside. (If you don't have a stainless bowl, see below.) In a small bowl, whisk the herbs, vinegar, and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Drizzle half the dressing (reserve the rest) over the greens and set the bowl over a burner heated to medium. With tongs, toss the greens in the bowl over the heat just until the greens begin to wilt.

(If you don't have a stainless bowl, heat half the dressing, reserving the rest, in a small saucepan and toss it with the greens in a mixing bowl off the heat.)

Add the hot cooked vegetables to the greens and toss well. Distribute the salad among four plates, top with the Parmesan, and drizzle on the remaining dressing or pass it at the table. Serve warm.

Chicken-Mesclun Salad with Hazelnut Dressing

You can use leftover roasted chicken pulled off the bone in place of the sautéed breasts. For variety, try crumbled Gorgonzola in place of the aged Gouda, replace the portabellas with chanterelles, or substitute spinach for the mesclun. *Serves four.*

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 2 Tbs. red-wine vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 1 tsp. Dijon-style mustard
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 Tbs. hazelnut oil (or just use more olive oil)
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh basil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

(Recipe list continues)

GET GREAT-LOOKING WARM SALADS

When I "plate" warm salads, I find that using tongs is the best way to evenly distribute the greens and other ingredients (the ones that tend to fall to the bottom of the bowl) over the serving plates. Or I reserve some of the garnishes to sprinkle on the plated salad.

Another trick is to dress the greens (reserving some of the dressing) and plate them. Then I fan the chicken or pork slices over the salad and drizzle on the remaining dressing.



Don't forget texture. Crunchy hazelnuts are a nice contrast to silky chicken and mesclun with a hazelnut dressing.

FOR THE SALAD:

- ½ lb. mesclun mix
- 3 Tbs. olive oil
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (4 oz. each)
- 2 large portabella mushrooms, thinly sliced
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup (1¼ oz.) grated aged Gouda
- ½ cup toasted chopped hazelnuts

To make the dressing—In a medium bowl, whisk together the vinegar, garlic, shallot, and mustard. Slowly whisk in the oils until emulsified. Add the herbs, season with salt and pepper, and mix well. Set aside.

To make the salad—Put the mesclun in a large mixing bowl; set aside. In a large sauté pan, heat 2 Tbs. of the olive oil over high until very hot. Add the chicken and sear well, about 2 to 3 min. per side. Reduce the heat to medium low and continue cooking until the chicken is done, 5 to 8 min., depending on thickness. Transfer the chicken to a cutting board, let rest 5 min., and slice thinly on the bias. Add the remaining 1 Tbs. oil to the sauté pan, turn the heat to medium high, and add the mushrooms and red onion. Sauté until tender, about 4 min. Reduce the heat to low, pour in the dressing, and just heat through. Pour the mushroom and onion mixture and about three-quarters of the liquid from the pan onto the greens and toss well to gently wilt them. Distribute the salad among four serving plates. Top with the sliced chicken, cheese, and hazelnuts. Drizzle the remainder of the dressing over the chicken and serve immediately.

Pork Tenderloin & Spinach Salad with Shallot Dressing

This salad is terrific with chicken instead of pork, and I also like it with pecans as well as walnuts. The shallots cook along with the pork, allowing you to mix the dressing in the pan. *Serves four.*

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 3 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp. Dijon-style mustard
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SALAD:

- 1 bunch spinach (about 10 oz.), stemmed
- 1¼ lb. pork tenderloin, rinsed and patted dry
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbs. olive oil
- 6 whole shallots, peeled and quartered
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 1 large ripe, firm pear, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced
- ½ cup toasted walnuts
- 8 very thin slices red onion (optional)

To make the dressing—In a medium bowl, whisk together the vinegar, mustard, and garlic. Slowly whisk in the olive oil until the mixture is smooth and emulsified. Add the herbs, season with salt and pepper, and mix well. Set aside.



Dress warm salads just before serving—they don't take well to sitting around. Here roast pork tops spinach leaves that were just tossed with roasted shallot vinaigrette.

To make the salad—Heat the oven to 350°F. Put the spinach in a large mixing bowl and set aside. Season the tenderloin with salt and pepper. In a large, ovenproof sauté pan, heat the olive oil over high until very hot, add the tenderloin, and sear well, about 2 min. on all sides. Push the tenderloin aside and add the shallots to the pan, shaking the pan to coat the shallots with the pan drippings. Put the pan in the oven and roast the tenderloin and shallots until the tenderloin is medium rare (130°F), 15 to 18 min., or to desired doneness (the USDA recommends 160°F, but I find that it makes the pork much too dry). Remove the pork from the pan and let it rest on a cutting board for 5 to 10 min. Slice it thinly on the bias.

Set the sauté pan over high heat, add the dressing, and bring it just to a boil, scraping the shallots and any pan drippings into the dressing. Pour the dressing over the spinach, add the cranberries and pear, and toss well. Use tongs to distribute the greens, cranberries, and pear slices evenly on four plates. Top with the pork slices and toasted walnuts. Garnish with red onion slices, if you like.

Shrimp & Vegetable Salad with Ginger-Orange Dressing

You can use basil instead of cilantro (or a combination of both), or add a teaspoon of curry powder to the dressing for a slightly more exotic flavor. If you can't find mizuna, use mesclun. Thai sweet-hot chili sauce is sold in many grocery stores (look for A Taste of Thai brand). *Serves four.*

- ½ lb. mizuna, washed and dried
- ½ cup plus 2 Tbs. vegetable oil
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 tsp. chopped fresh ginger
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 cup sliced shiitake mushroom caps (6 medium)
- 1 small red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and julienned
- ¼ lb. snow peas, cut in half if large
- 24 jumbo shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 Tbs. rice vinegar
- Juice and grated zest of 1 orange
- 1 Tbs. Thai sweet-hot chili sauce
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 tsp. soy sauce

Divide the mizuna among four large serving plates or shallow bowls. Set aside.

In a large sauté pan, heat 2 Tbs. of the oil over high heat. Add the garlic and ginger; sauté lightly, about 15 seconds. Add the onion, shiitakes, red pepper, and snow peas and sauté about 3 min. Add the peeled shrimp and sauté just until the shrimp begins to turn pink, about 2 min. Add the vinegar, orange juice, and zest, and turn off the heat. Add the remaining ½ cup oil, the chili sauce, cilantro, and soy sauce; stir to combine. With a slotted spoon, distribute the shrimp and vegetables over the mizuna. Drizzle the dressing over each salad and serve immediately.

Look for Caprial Pence, co-owner of Caprial's Bistro in Portland, Oregon, on her PBS television show, "Cooking with Caprial." ♦

Holiday Cookies for Grownups

No sprinkles, no icing, just a sophisticated quartet of delicate French butter cookies

BY JOANNE CHANG

Chocolate-chip cookies fresh from the oven—who hasn't succumbed to devouring them straight off the baking sheet, the chocolate still melted and gooey? The French, that's who. At Payard Pâtisserie, the French bakery where I worked in New York, none of my French colleagues had ever had a homemade chocolate-chip cookie.

Talk about a cultural divide. I teased my co-workers mercilessly about their deprived childhoods. I brought them oatmeal raisin cookies and snickerdoodles, introduced them to Oreos and Girl Scout Thin Mints, determined to bridge the gap.

In return, my French friends taught me a whole range of French-style cookies, called *petits fours secs* (translated, this means small cakes or cookies from the oven, unfrosted or unfilled). Not as homey and never as large as American cookies, *petits fours secs* (peh-tee FOOR seck) are subdued, polished, yet equally enticing. These butter cookies are perfect for when you want to end a meal with coffee and just a few sweets, or when you want to give charming homemade gifts.

Sophistication and simplicity in the same cookie

What ties this refined group of cookies together is that none are too sweet, all are small enough to eat in one or two bites, and, while they may seem fancier than, say, Toll House cookies, the doughs are all uncomplicated and easy to prepare. The basic method for all the cookies is



Squared logs of buttery dough slice up easily into dozens of tender cookies.

the same, and it's simple: cream the butter, slowly add the sugar until thoroughly combined, beat in the egg, and then fold in the remaining ingredients. At the pastry shop, we used almond flour in addition to all-purpose flour, but you'll get excellent results using almonds that you finely grind in a food processor. Success lies in precision: careful measuring for consistent results, shaping the logs evenly so they slice into uniform shapes, chilling the buttery dough thoroughly so it doesn't soften when you handle it, and rotating the baking sheets halfway through baking so all the cookies brown evenly. Another tip is to chill the sliced cookies before baking if they're at all soft.

Bring the butter and eggs to room temperature. It's also important that they're both around the same temperature. If the butter is too soft and the eggs come straight from the refrigerator, the butter will harden into tiny specks during mixing and will look curdled. (Don't panic if this happens: you'll just have to mix a little longer until the batter smooths out. And you'll still get delicious cookies.)

Cream the butter thoroughly until it has softened and whitened. This can take up to five minutes, but it will ensure that the remaining ingredients blend easily into the butter. Scrape the bowl thoroughly during mixing; uncreamed flecks of butter

in the dough will melt during baking and cause the cookies to lose their neat shape, spread into blobs, and bake unevenly.

As soon as the last ingredients are well incorporated, stop the mixer. Mix-



Perfectly creamed butter is key to a smooth and workable dough.

ing any more than necessary means you run the risk of a less tender cookie.

Lightly flour both the work surface and the knife.

Once the dough is shaped, chilled, and ready to slice, you want to be sure it doesn't stick to the counter. If the dough does start to



stick as you slice it, put it in the freezer for ten minutes or so to firm up.

Freeze the dough and bake what you need. These recipe yields are big (especially for the checkerboard cookies), which is helpful during holiday time. But if you don't feel like baking huge amounts at a time, just freeze the shaped logs, defrost them in the refrigerator the night before you plan to bake, and then bake as much as you need.

RECIPES

Coconut Sablés

No matter how many times you reroll the scraps, these cookies always come out tender and delicate, which is one reason I love them so much. You can roll out sheets of dough and freeze them, well-wrapped, for several weeks. Stamping frozen dough won't affect baking time because it's rolled out so thinly. Unsweetened coconut can be found at health-food stores. *Yields about 80 cookies.*

2½ oz. (⅔ cup) finely ground almonds

2½ oz. (1 cup) unsweetened shredded coconut

10 oz. (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour

10 oz. (20 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature

½ tsp. salt

5 oz. (1⅓ cups) confectioners' sugar

1 large egg, at room temperature

Blend the ground almonds, coconut, and flour; set aside. With the paddle of an electric mixer (or regular beaters), cream the butter on medium speed until soft and creamy but not melted. Add the salt and confectioners' sugar; mix on medium-low speed until thoroughly combined, about 5 min., scraping down the bowl as needed. Reduce the speed to low and add the egg; mix until incorporated. Add the flour mixture; as soon as the dough comes together, stop the mixer. Divide the dough into three parts. Roll each part between two sheets of parchment to about ⅛ inch thick. Transfer the dough, still between the parchment, to baking sheets and chill in the freezer for about 30 min.

Heat the oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment. When the dough is quite firm, peel off the top sheet of parchment and stamp out shapes with a 2-inch round scalloped cookie cutter (or whatever shape you like, though shapes with skinny parts will brown unevenly). Lay the cookies ½ inch apart on the baking sheet. Reroll the scraps, chilling first if necessary. Bake

Sheets of dough rolled thin and frozen make for easy stamping



Coconut Sablés are easiest to stamp when you first freeze a rolled-out sheet of dough for 30 minutes.



Lay the cookies about ½ inch apart on a parchment-lined baking sheet. They'll spread just a bit as they bake.



Subtle, simple, and not too sweet. These French butter cookies all start with thoroughly creamed sweet butter and just enough mixing to combine the dough.

until the cookies are light golden around the edges, 8 to 10 min., rotating the sheet halfway through. Cool on the baking sheet until cool enough to handle (about 10 min.) and then transfer the cookies to a rack.

Toasted Almond Butter Thins

If the dough starts to get too soft as you cut the cookies, stick it in the freezer to firm it up.

*Yields about
12 dozen cookies.*

9 oz. (2¼ cups) slivered almonds, toasted
4½ oz. (1¼ cups) cake flour
4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
¾ tsp. salt
10 oz. (2⅔ cups) confectioners' sugar
1 large egg, at room temperature

Blend the almonds and both flours; set aside. With the paddle of an electric mixer

(or regular beaters), cream the butter on medium speed until soft and creamy but not melted. Add the salt and confectioners' sugar; mix on medium-low speed until thoroughly combined, about 5 min., scraping the bowl as needed. Reduce the speed to low and add the egg; mix until blended. Add the flour mixture; as soon as the dough comes together, stop the mixer. Scrape the dough onto a large sheet of plastic wrap. Using the wrap to help shape and protect the dough, gently press it into a rectangle that's about 4½x8 inches and about 1½ inches thick. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until dough is firm enough to slice, at least 3 hours.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment. Unwrap the dough, trim the edges, and slice it into three 1½-inch-square logs. Slice each log into square cookies between ⅛ and ¼ inch thick. Lay the squares ½ inch apart on the baking sheet. Bake until lightly browned around the edges, about 8 min., rotating the sheet halfway through. Cool on the baking sheet



Use a very sharp knife to slice the buttery, nut-studded dough (be sure it's cold) for Toasted Almond Butter Thins.

Shaping checkerboard cookies

To build the first layer sandwich one strip of chocolate between two vanilla. Press the strips together.



Brush the pressed-together strips with egg wash to bind them and the next layer. Brush each succeeding layer with more egg wash.



Don't worry if the strips break; gently press the pieces together as you build a 3x3 checkerboard.

Toasted Almond Butter Thins, continued

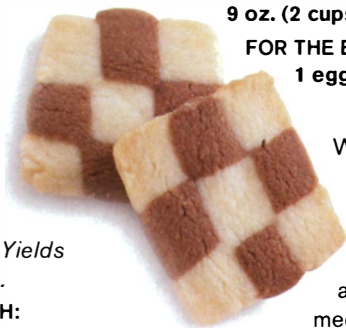
until cool enough to handle (about 10 min.) and then transfer the cookies to a rack.

Checkerboard Cookies

You'll end up with a little chocolate dough left over. The yield is big for this recipe, but the dough keeps for months in the freezer as long as you wrap it well. *Yields about 18 dozen cookies.*

FOR THE VANILLA DOUGH:

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
½ tsp. salt
3½ oz. (1 cup) confectioners' sugar
1½ oz. (⅓ cup plus 1 Tbs.) finely ground almonds
1 egg yolk, at room temperature
1 tsp. vanilla extract
9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour
FOR THE CHOCOLATE DOUGH:
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
½ tsp. salt



3½ oz. (1 cup) confectioners' sugar
1 oz. (¼ cup) finely ground almonds
1 oz. (¼ cup) natural (not Dutch process) cocoa
1 egg yolk, at room temperature
9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour

FOR THE EGG WASH:

1 egg, whisked well

To mix the vanilla dough—

With the paddle of an electric mixer (or regular beaters), cream the butter on medium speed until soft and creamy but not melted. Add the salt and confectioners' sugar; mix on medium-low speed until thoroughly combined, about 5 min., scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Reduce the speed to low and add the ground almonds, egg yolk, and vanilla extract; mix until blended. Add the flour; as soon as the dough comes together, stop the mixer. Roll the dough between two sheets of parchment or waxed paper into an 8½x11-inch rectangle that's ⅓ inch thick; try to get the thickness very even. Transfer the dough to a baking sheet; refrigerate for several hours until hardened.

To mix the chocolate dough—Follow the instructions for the vanilla dough, adding the cocoa along with the ground almonds. Roll and chill as for the vanilla.

To assemble the cookies—Remove the dough from the refrigerator, peel off the paper from both sides and set the dough onto a fresh sheet of parchment. Using a sharp, thin knife, slice both doughs lengthwise into square strips about ⅓ inch thick. If the dough starts to soften, freeze it briefly to firm it up.

Set up your workspace so that you have a baking sheet to work on in front of you, both doughs to one side, and the egg wash with a pastry brush to the other side. Lay a strip of vanilla dough lengthwise on the baking sheet; then lay a strip of chocolate dough next to the vanilla; finally lay another

Want to see this in action?

Check out our video on making checkerboard cookies on our web site: www.finecooking.com



Press the log firmly together on all sides to join the strips and square it up.

With a sharp knife, cut the log into 1/4-inch thick slices and space them 1/2 inch apart on the parchment-lined sheet.

strip of vanilla next to the chocolate. Press the three strips gently together so that they stick to one another. Brush the tops with the egg wash.

Lay a strip of chocolate directly on top of the first strip of vanilla, lay a strip of vanilla next to that, and a strip of chocolate next to that. Again, gently but firmly press together and down to ensure that all the strips are stuck to one another. Brush this layer with more egg wash. Finish with another layer of vanilla-chocolate-vanilla. Gently press the log together on all sides. Make more logs with the remaining strips. Chill the logs for at least an hour.

Heat the oven to 375°F and line a baking sheet with parchment. When the logs are hard enough to slice, remove them from refrigerator. Slice into cookies about 1/4 inch thick. Set the squares 1/2 inch apart on the baking sheet and bake until the vanilla parts are lightly browned, about 8 min., rotating the sheet halfway through. Cool on the baking sheet until cool enough to handle (about 10 min.) and then transfer the cookies to a rack.

Chocolate-Nut Wafers

As with the Toasted Almond Butter Thins, a very sharp knife makes it easy to slice the nutty dough into neat squares. *Yields about 12 dozen cookies.*

9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose flour
2 oz. (1/2 cup) natural (not Dutch process) cocoa

1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon

8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature

3/4 tsp. salt

10 oz. (2 2/3 cups) confectioners' sugar

1 large egg, at room temperature

8 oz. (scant 2 cups) chopped walnuts

4 oz. (scant 1 cup) chopped pistachios

Blend the flour, cocoa, and cinnamon; set aside. With the paddle of an electric mixer (or regular beaters), cream the butter on medium speed until soft and creamy but not melted. Add the salt and confectioners' sugar; mix on medium-low speed until thoroughly combined, about 5 min., scraping the bowl as needed. Re-

duce the speed to low and add the egg; mix until blended. Add the walnuts, the pistachios, and the flour mixture; as soon as the dough comes together, stop the mixer. Scrape the dough onto a large sheet of plastic wrap. Using the wrap to help shape and protect the dough, gently press it into a 6-inch square that's 1 1/2 inches thick. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until the dough is firm enough to slice, at least 4 hours.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment. Unwrap the dough, trim the edges, and slice the square into four 1 1/2-inch square logs. Slice each log into square cookies between 1/8 and 1/4 inch thick. Lay the squares 1/2 inch apart on the baking sheet. Bake until the tops look dry and the nuts look slightly brown-tinged, 8 to 10 min., rotating the sheet halfway through. Cool the cookies on the baking sheet until cool enough to handle (about 10 min.) and then transfer the cookies to a rack.

Pastry chef Joanne Chang is preparing to open Flour, her own pastry shop, in Boston. ♦

Gifts from the Kitchen Made for Cooks

COMPILED BY JOANNE SMART

If every year you vow to add something personal, something delicious, and something homemade to your gift list, the following pages will help you keep that promise. We asked some of our favorite chefs who write frequently for us for the recipes for the food items they like to give as gifts. But we didn't want the usual suspects—cookies, cakes, and candies. Instead, we asked for those things that would interest the cooks on both sides: the one giving and the one getting.

Joanne Smart is an associate editor for Fine Cooking.



You can add the vivacious flavors of preserved lemons to a range of dishes, from authentic Moroccan fare to tuna sandwiches.

Preserved lemons— as pretty as they are tasty

Casablanca-born Kitty Morse, author of several books on the cooking of North Africa, calls preserved lemons “a great flavor that you can’t quite figure out.” To make preserved lemons, the lemons are filled with salt and stored until they become tender and jam-like, with a taste that’s tangy and savory. A beguiling condiment straight from Morocco, the lemons are ready to eat once the rind has softened. For a companion gift, package a cookbook on Moroccan cuisine

Photos: Scott Phillips

along with these beautiful lemons to provide the recipient with actual recipes that use the lemons.

How to give and use—Preserved lemons are usually added to dishes toward the end of cooking. The pulp gets scraped from the rind and blended with the juices or sauce, of a braised chicken for example, to flavor and thicken them, while the rind gets sliced or diced and sprinkled over the dish. Preserved lemons can also be used straight from the jar, and they don't only go with Moroccan specialties. "My husband adds chopped preserved lemon rind to tuna salad," notes Morse.

Preserved Lemons

Yields 1 quart.

10 to 12 unblemished, thin-skinned lemons, washed and dried
Kosher salt

Wash and dry a 1-qt. wide-mouth glass jar. Cut a thin slice from the top and bottom of each lemon. Set 1 lemon on end and slice it three-quarters of the way through the fruit so that the two halves remain attached at the base; do not cut it in half. Turn the lemon upside down, rotate it 90 degrees, and make a second slit down the center, crosswise to the first.

Fill each cut with as much salt as it will hold. Put the lemon in the bottom of the jar. Repeat with the remaining lemons, compressing them into the jar until no space is left. The number of lemons you can squeeze into a jar will depend on their size, the thickness of their skin, and the dimensions of the jar. A dozen small, thin-skinned lemons, such as Meyers, should fit in a 1-qt. jar.

As you proceed, the juice squeezed from the lemons should fill the jar. The lemons will get easier to squeeze into the jar the longer they sit. In fact, more lemons can be added the next day as the rinds begin to soften. If the lemons aren't completely covered with juice, add some juice squeezed from other lemons to cover. Seal and set the jar aside. Make sure the lemons are covered by juice at all times, adding more if necessary. The lemons are ready to use when tender, in 3 to 4 weeks. Rinse them lightly before using. Once opened, store in a cool, dry place or refrigerate. They'll keep for up to 6 months in the refrigerator.



Open up the cut lemon slightly to pack in as much salt as possible.



Tapenade and a baguette make a great appetizer.

A deliciously different tapenade

Most people think of black olives for tapenade, but green olives and the addition of almonds give this spread a Provençal feel. "When the olives and almonds are crushed together to make this spread, the nuts contribute their oil as well as their texture and flavor," says Georgeanne Brennan, author of numerous cookbooks including *Apéritif*, which recently won an IACP/Julia Child award.

How to give and use—Give a jar along with a crusty baguette since tapenade spread on little toasts makes a great appetizer. It also makes a tangy topping for savory tarts and pizza and is delicious tossed with pasta along with a little olive oil and some fresh goat cheese. Brennan also tucks this tapenade under the skin of a chicken breast as a flavor booster.

Green Olive & Almond Tapenade

The saltiness of your olives will determine how many anchovies you use. For best results, make the recipe in the following amount, making additional batches if you want larger quantities. It will keep for a few weeks in the refrigerator. *Yields 3 cups.*

4 cups unpitted green, Mediterranean-style olives
4 to 6 whole salt-packed anchovies (or 10 to 12 oil-cured anchovy fillets)
¼ lb. (about 1 cup) slivered almonds, toasted
1 Tbs. minced garlic
1 Tbs. capers, drained
1 tsp. fresh lemon juice (optional)
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Pit the olives with a knife; set aside. If using salt-packed anchovies, wash the anchovies in several changes of water. Separate the fillets by running a knife or your finger along the backbone; remove any large bones. Put the pitted olives, anchovies, almonds, garlic, capers, lemon juice, and olive oil in a food processor; process until a coarse paste forms.

Dessert sauces— perfect for the sweet-tooth on your list

Kathleen Stewart, who runs the Downtown Bakery in Healdsburg, California, gives a good reason why a gift of both her chocolate and caramel sauces makes delicious sense: “They’re *so* good together.” Stewart sells these same sauces at her bakery.

How to give and use—If your friends can resist eating these straight from the jar, they can use them as a topping for ice cream. Although the sauces will last two weeks in the refrigerator, Stewart suggests that people keep them in the freezer, where they’ll last “forever.”

Chocolate Sauce

Kathleen Stewart uses Callebaut chocolate to make her sauce, but any high-quality chocolate would work. *Yields about 8 cups.*

2½ cups heavy cream
1½ cups water
¼ cup light corn syrup
1¾ lb. bittersweet chocolate,
chopped into small pieces
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter,
cut into pieces
Pinch salt

In a 4-qt. heavy-based saucepan, combine the cream, water, and corn syrup over medium heat until hot; don’t let this mixture boil.

Turn the heat to medium low and whisk in the chocolate until it melts and the sauce is smooth, about 5 min. Take the pan off the heat and whisk in the butter and salt, stirring until the sauce is smooth and glossy.

Let cool slightly, pour into jars, cover, and chill. The sauce will keep in the refrigerator for two weeks but can be frozen indefinitely.

Caramel Sauce

Tilt the pan as you cook the caramel to better gauge its changing color. *Yields about 5½ cups.*

4 cups sugar
1 cup water
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter,
cut into pieces, at room
temperature
2 cups heavy cream
¼ cup light corn syrup

In a large, heavy-based saucepan, combine the sugar and water. Set over medium heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Increase the heat to high and cook, swirling the pan for even color, until the mixture turns a very deep amber. Take the pan from the heat and *carefully* add the butter, cream, and corn syrup: the caramel will sputter and steam.

Put the pan back on the stove and bring the mixture to a boil, whisking frequently to mix the ingredients. Continue boiling for a total of 3 min.

Let cool slightly, pour into jars, cover, and chill. The sauce will keep in the refrigerator for two weeks but can be frozen indefinitely.



Pour the caramel sauce into jars while it’s still warm.

Spice mixes add the exotic instantly

Robert Wemischner, author of *The Vivid Flavors Cookbook* and of articles for *Fine Cooking* on capers, ginger, and rosemary, offers three of his favorite spice rubs, each with an international accent. “The results depend on the freshness of the spices,” advises Wemischner. “If you plan to make a bunch of mixes, buy in bulk from a reputable dealer.” (See Sources, p. 87.)

How to give and use—A tag affixed to the jar with the following recipe suggestions would be helpful and appreciated. Stored in airtight jars or tins in a cool, dark place, each mix will keep for two months.

The Caribbean mix makes a great rub for pork and chicken. Create a paste by combining it with olive oil to moisten and then massage it onto the meat. On the dessert side, the same mix can be used as a flavoring for a sugar-and-water syrup used for poaching fresh and dried fruits.

Flavored mustards, easy to make

David Page and Barbara Shinn, owners of Home and Drovers restaurants in New York City, have already divulged the recipe for their famous ketchup in *Fine Cooking* #16. Now they offer a sampling of their delicious flavored mustards (the three here: scallion, roasted garlic, and cranberry). “All the flavored mustards that we use are derived from a simple base of prepared mustard,” says Page.

How to give and use—This trio of mustards given along with smoked meats or sausages is a great gift: a simple, practically ready-made meal. The mustards also add robust flavor to sandwiches and vinagrettes. The mustards will keep longer if canned, but even without canning they’ll last about a month in the refrigerator.

Scallion Mustard

Yields 2½ cups.

2 bunches scallions (about 18 scallions)
¾ cup Dijon mustard

The Indian mix is wonderful added to bread dough or buttermilk biscuit dough ($\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 teaspoon per cup of flour). Or use it to flavor flour or breadcrumbs to coat fish fillets or fish steaks before frying.

The Chai mix is traditionally used to prepare a fragrant addition to a cup of brewed robust tea: Add a tablespoon of the spice mix to a cup of milk along with a tablespoon of sugar and beat the mixture to a froth; strain the milk to remove the spices before adding it to tea. The same mix enlivens a turkey breast (use $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon for each pound of meat and coat it before roasting) and adds a warm South-east Asian glow to a beef-noodle soup.

Caribbean Spice Mix

Yields about 1 cup.

4 Tbs. ground ginger
4 Tbs. finely ground black pepper
3 Tbs. dried orange peel, ground
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground mace
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cloves
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup packed brown sugar

Mix all the ingredients until well blended.

Warm Indian Spice Mix

Yields about 1 cup.

6 Tbs. whole coriander seeds
6 Tbs. whole cumin seeds
1 Tbs. whole brown or black mustard seeds
1 tsp. Hungarian hot paprika
2 tsp. ground turmeric
1 tsp. dried rosemary, crumbled
1 tsp. dried dill weed, crumbled

In a heavy skillet over medium heat, toast the coriander, cumin, and mustard seeds until fragrant but not brown. Let cool and pour into a spice grinder or mortar and pestle, along with the remaining ingredients, and process until finely pulverized.

My Chai Mix

Yields about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.

4 Tbs. ground cinnamon (or 8 cinnamon sticks, each about 3 to 4 inches long)
2 Tbs. cardamom seeds (if using whole pods, remove any papery pods)



Spice mixes work in both sweet and savory dishes.

1 Tbs. whole black peppercorns
8 whole star anise

Process all the ingredients in a spice grinder until finely ground.

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cups olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Wash the scallions under cold water and coarsely chop them, separating white and green parts. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil and blanch the green parts for 1 min., rinse under cold water, drain, and dry thoroughly. In a food processor, chop the white and green parts together.



This mustard trio makes a colorful gift.

Add the mustard and continue to process until smooth. Slowly add the olive oil until incorporated. Season to taste with salt and pepper; refrigerate.

Roasted Garlic Mustard

Use a prepared mustard that's not too assertive so that the flavor of the garlic comes through. *Yields $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups.*

6 heads garlic, any loose papery skin removed
Olive oil
2 Tbs. sherry vinegar
3 Tbs. honey
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups whole-grain Dijon mustard
1 Tbs. minced fresh thyme
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 400°F. Cut off the top third of each garlic head to expose the cloves. Coat the cut sides with a little olive oil, wrap the heads loosely in foil, set on a baking sheet, and roast until soft, about 1 hour. Squeeze the garlic pulp into a medium bowl (you should have about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup). Whisk in the vinegar, honey, and mustard until smooth. Stir in the thyme and season to taste with salt and pepper; refrigerate.

Cranberry Mustard

If you use frozen cranberries, let them come to room temperature before using or simmer them longer. *Yields 3 cups.*

2 Tbs. olive oil
1 Tbs. butter
1 large red onion, thinly sliced
1 lb. fresh cranberries
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup honey
2 Tbs. mustard seeds, cracked
2 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
3 Tbs. Dijon mustard
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a medium skillet, heat the olive oil and butter, add the onion, and cook over medium low until golden brown and soft, 20 to 25 min. In a 3-qt. pot, bring 1 cup water to a boil. Add the cranberries, sugar, and honey. Simmer until all the cranberries have popped, about 5 min. Add the mustard seeds, vinegar, and mustard and cook until the berries are glazed and the juices thick, about another 5 min. Transfer to a food processor and pulse until puréed. Strain through a fine mesh sieve. Season with salt and pepper to taste; refrigerate. ♦

A perfectly browned, perfectly shaped loaf. The caramelized flavor of the crust permeates the whole loaf.



How to Get a Good Crust on Rustic Breads

Make your oven steamy, watch the temperature, and don't forget the salt

BY FRAN GAGE

When I owned a bakery in San Francisco, customers who loved our rustic bread would often ask if there were any way they could make similar loaves at home. Could they get that same delicious, dark, crackling crust without a fancy professional oven? The answer is yes. By knowing how crusts form and by paying attention to detail, home bakers can make delicious bread with crusts that rival those made by professionals.

A good crust starts long before the bread is baked

The ingredients you choose and the way you handle them all influence a bread's crust. While not all breads want a hard crust—brioche and other sweet, enriched doughs should have a crust that easily yields to the bite, for example—the leaner doughs used to make rustic loaves benefit from a more substantial crust. These thick, chewy crusts contrast wonderfully with the bread's soft, porous interior.

Pick the right flour to give the bread structure. Because flour provides the starch and the protein necessary for the dough to develop, the type of flour you choose is important. Bread flour, with 12% to 13% protein, will develop the proper amount of gluten to give the dough its structure.



A good crust starts with the right ingredients. Bread flour gives the bread structure; salt adds flavor and contributes to a nice dark crust. The author's wall-mounted scale folds up when not in use.

Salt is vital to a good crust. Salt has many functions in bread dough, including adding flavor and aiding in gluten formation. But it also contributes to the color of the bread's crust. How? Caramelizing of unfermented sugars plays a large role in the browning of the crust; too much fermentation would use up the available sugars (the yeast consume the sugars and produce carbon dioxide, alcohol, and organic acids during fermentation). Salt tempers the conversion of starch to sugar, so not as much sugar is available to feed the yeast. Breads made without salt tend to have pale crusts and, of course, a flat, dull taste.

When handling the dough, use as little additional flour as possible. Rustic breads often undergo their second rise in cloth-lined baskets or bowls that have been dusted with flour. Sometimes bakers will sieve flour over loaves before baking to give them this rustic look. This additional flour is all right, but only in very small amounts. A heavy coating of raw flour can interfere with the crust formation.

A few easy steps to mimic a professional oven

The first few minutes after the dough goes into the oven are crucial for the crust. Contact with the heat causes a final burst of fermentation, and the additional carbon dioxide and expanding gas cells push



Too much additional flour can hamper crust formation. Try to use as little flour as possible when kneading.



Allow the dough to rise just until doubled. Overfermentation can adversely affect the crust.



A few slashes with a razor blade allow the bread to rise evenly. Uncut bread will give you a haphazardly ripped crust.



A little flour dusted on top gives the loaf a rustic look. Keep the coating light.

the loaf to its full expansion. This is known as oven spring. The oven spring continues for several minutes until the interior of the loaf reaches 140°F, the temperature at which yeast cells die. You can practically guarantee a good oven spring—and a great crust—by creating the best environment in your oven.

Check the accuracy of your oven's thermostat. The correct oven temperature is vital for a good oven spring. If the oven isn't hot enough, the expanding gases that cause oven spring will take the loaf to full expansion before the starch and protein start to set. The loaf will collapse and end up flat, and the crust will never brown well. On the other hand, in an oven that's too hot, the loaf will set before it fully expands and the crust will burn. Because ovens often heat to a temperature different from what their thermostats profess (even professional ovens), I double-check the heat with a thermometer every time I bake.

Use a baking stone to disperse the heat evenly. With a baking stone, you can replicate the floor of a professional oven, where hearth-baked loaves are set directly on heavy stones to promote a crisp, brown crust. Large tiles sometimes called pizza stones are sold in cookware shops. You can also use unglazed quarry tiles found in building-supply stores. (Government regulations require that all American-made tiles are lead-free.) Be sure to heat the stone or tiles in the oven for about 45 minutes before you put the bread on them; otherwise, they'll offer little benefit.

Create steam in the oven by pouring water into a hot pan. Creating steam in the oven is crucial to making a crusty loaf of bread. Why? Steam delays the setting of the bread's crust. If the crust sets too quickly, the oven spring will be hampered. (For more on steam and breadbaking, see Food Science, p. 82)

Recipes usually mention one of three ways to add steam—throwing ice cubes into a hot pan in the bottom of the oven, spraying the loaf and the inside of the oven with water, or pouring hot water into a pan in the bottom of the oven (or on the bottom rack if your oven has an element on its floor). Experimenting with all three methods has made me a believer in the third option. Neither the ice-cube nor the spray method generates enough moisture. And it's only in the beginning phase of baking that

the steam is advantageous; the last stage, when the crust is browning, requires a dry oven.

Slash the crust with a razor just before it goes into the oven. Slashing the crust helps it develop evenly. An uncut crust will rip haphazardly as it expands in the first stages of baking.

A dark crust means a more flavorful loaf

Bread crust doesn't begin to brown until the final stages of baking, when the sugars that didn't ferment during rising begin to caramelize, and a complex reaction between the sugars and proteins on the surface of the loaf causes it to darken.

A dark crust affects more than the appearance of a loaf of bread; the flavor of the browning crust permeates the whole loaf and contributes to the overall taste of the bread. You'll find that breads with pale crusts are not as flavorful as those with darker ones.

Keep the crust crisp with proper storage. As soon as a loaf of bread starts to cool, nature goes to work and the bread starts to go stale. The interior of the loaf dries out and the crisp crust that you've worked hard to create starts to absorb moisture, making it soft and rubbery. Wrapping the bread in plastic will preserve the interior of the loaf, but it will also soften the crust. If it's a soft interior you're after, store your bread in plastic, but if you love crusty bread, keep it in a brown paper bag or just let it sit on a kitchen counter. And don't throw it away if it gets stale. You can bring new life to a stale loaf by moistening the outside with a little water with your hands and heating it in a 400°F oven for about 15 minutes. And don't forget that stale bread also makes great toast.

Tips for a thick, crispy crust



- ◆ When kneading and shaping the dough, use only enough flour to keep the dough from sticking.
- ◆ Make sure the oven is set to the right temperature and that the thermostat is accurate.
- ◆ Bake the bread on a hot baking stone.
- ◆ Introduce steam to the oven by pouring hot water into a pan in the bottom of the oven.
- ◆ Let the bread bake long enough for a rich, brown crust to develop so that the crust can contribute to the overall taste of the bread.
- ◆ To keep the crust crisp longer, store bread in a paper bag or on the kitchen counter.



Create steam in your oven for a full rise and a good crust.

The best way: standing as far away from the oven as possible, pour hot water into a hot pan already positioned on the bottom shelf of the oven. Close the oven door immediately to trap the steam.

RECIPE

Rustic Whole-Wheat Walnut Bread

A combination of coarse and fine whole-wheat flours gives this bread a more interesting texture. You can find the coarse kind at most health-food stores; Arrowhead Mills and King Arthur are two brands. You can also make the bread using the fine whole-wheat flour in place of the coarse (use the same weight). Make two smaller loaves rather than one big one if you're a real fan of crusty bread. *Yields one nearly 2-pound loaf or two smaller ones.*

1¼ tsp. active dry yeast
1½ cups cool water
9 oz. (2 cups) unbleached bread flour
5 oz. (1 cup plus 2 Tbs.) fine whole-wheat flour
4 oz. (¾ cup) coarse stone-ground whole-wheat flour
2 tsp. salt
1 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped

In the mixing bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer, sprinkle the yeast over the water. Let it sit until the yeast dissolves and the water looks milky. Add the flours, salt, and walnuts. With the paddle attachment, mix on low speed until a rough dough forms. Change to the dough hook and knead on medium speed until the dough pulls away from the bowl to form a ball. You may need to add a small amount of flour or water to get the right consistency.

Turn the dough out into a lightly oiled bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Set in a warm spot (about 75°F) until doubled in bulk, 2½ to 3 hours.

Line a basket or bowl with a kitchen towel or a piece of cotton fabric and sprinkle it lightly with flour. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work

surface, knead it a few times, and shape it into a round. Put it in the basket, bottom up, and fold the ends of the towel over it. Cover with a large plastic bag (like a kitchen garbage bag). Set in a warm place and let rise until doubled in bulk, about 1½ hours.

Set one oven rack in the lowest position; put a large, shallow pan on that rack. Set the second rack just above that and position the baking stone on it. Heat the oven to 425°F for at least 45 min. Just before you put the bread in the oven, bring about 2 cups of water to a boil.

Lightly dust a baking peel or a flat baking sheet with flour. Remove the plastic bag and gently invert the dough onto the peel. (The dough may deflate somewhat.) Remove the basket and towel. With a single-edge razor blade or a sharp serrated knife, make a few slashes in the surface of the dough.

With a quick jerk, slide the dough from the peel to the baking stone. Wearing long oven mitts and standing as far away from the oven as you can, immediately pour the boiling water into the pan in the bottom of the oven. *Caution:* This will cause an instant burst of steam. Close the oven door immediately and don't open it for at least 10 min. or the steam will escape.

Bake the bread until it is well browned and sounds hollow when thumped on the bottom, 35 to 40 min. Cool completely on a rack before serving.

Fran Gage, who owned and ran Pâtisserie Française in San Francisco for ten years, is now a cooking teacher, writer, and consultant. She's working on a book of food essays for Sasquatch Books. ♦

An Old-Fashioned Pantry



A triptych of French doors. The weekend house that chefs George Germon and Johanne Killeen have in Little Compton, Rhode Island, is short on space and long on style, so they've stashed equipment, food, and refrigeration behind three sets of glass-fronted doors.

Works in Today's Kitchen

Keeping your wares organized and handy is easy when your storage space is centralized

BY SALLY SAMPSON

When I first saw the house that would eventually become my home, it wasn't the kitchen that impressed me. In fact, with its brown tiled walls, dingy mosaic pattern linoleum, and Formica counters—once white, now vaguely yellow—the kitchen was worse than an eyesore. I almost walked out. But then I moved on to the attached pantry—a room of its own, four feet wide by 10 feet long, lined on one length with floor-to-ceiling cabinets. It was a heavenly space for me, since I'm a serious cook who also collects cookbooks, glasses, and dinnerware.

In my case, my pantry was like a gift that came with our 1890s house, but many cooking enthusiasts are requesting walk-in pantries when they build new houses or renovate their kitchens. Some people are even converting existing closets into true pantries.

The motivation for wanting a pantry can come from many different needs, as I learned when I surveyed cooks from around the country. Some look to a pantry as an alternative to traditional cabinetry, which requires lots of wall space and which some people find awkward to use: too high, too deep, too dark. Other cooks use their pantry as a place to organize and display special equipment or tableware. And large pantries are really helpful when entertaining, providing a staging area for arranging platters, setting up drinks, or handling dirty-dish overflow.

Sally Sampson has written several cookbooks, including *Chic Simple: Cooking and, with Todd English, The Olives Table and The Figs Table*. ♦



Dividing the space within the pantry is key to making it efficient and a pleasure to use. George Germon designed stainless-steel racks to hold large plates and platters.



A deep shelf can turn a storage space into a work space. The shelf at waist height is double depth, which means the small appliances that are stored there can be pulled forward and used.



Photos except where noted: Ben Fink



A pantry with a narrow focus. This slim pantry is designed for an avid baker, with just enough room to walk in but plenty of room for baking pans, sheets, molds, rings, and a collection of rolling pins, which line the door in special cradles.

The pantry as refuge. When Carol and Maury Sapoznik moved into their 1929 house, they gutted the kitchen, but left the pantry in its original state, just adding a Formica counter-top to create a desk. Situated between the kitchen and dining room, this mini room holds dishes, silver, and linens, and it's also a workspace where Carol does recipe planning. While the window eats up potential shelf space, it provides great light and fresh air.



A pantry's not the right spot for everything. When author Sally Sampson moved into her house, she wasn't quite sure which items to store in her butler's pantry and which to keep in the actual kitchen, closer to the stove and sink. After a few rounds of rearranging, she's settled on using the pantry for items that she uses no more than once a day. So, for example, flour and other baking ingredients, pastas, grains, cookbooks, and special cookware have a spot in the pantry (as does her daughter Lauren), while olive oil, salt, and a bowl of garlic stay in the main room.



Photo at far left: Grey Crawford



Fancy pantry. Boston chef Lydia Shire (Biba, Pignoli) combines aesthetics and efficiency in her unusual pantry. Floor-to-ceiling shelves on three sides hold Lydia's collections of fabulous dishware and special cooking equipment, with decorative pieces (like a set of miniature copper pans) mixed throughout. The fourth wall holds an extra dishwasher under a short length of counter, to use for entertaining.



A high-performance pantry isn't just for high-end kitchens. A simple closet can become a pantry, too. *Fine Cooking* editor Martha Holmberg knocked out two side-by-side closets with deep, dark, and awkward shelves (right). Her husband lined the space with birch-veneer plywood walls and oak shelving, creating 50 linear feet of storage on which every item is visible and instantly accessible.



A successful pantry works beautifully

The following tips can help you plan a pantry that's both efficient and attractive.

- ◆ Store the items you use most at eye level, and those you use least either very high or very low.
- ◆ If you do have high shelves, invest in a sturdy but compact stepstool.
- ◆ Consider wooden shelving, which can be affordable and is forgiving to china and glassware.
- ◆ Keep upper shelves narrow, no more than 12 inches deep; much deeper and you won't be able to see or reach what's at the back. Lower shelves can be deeper—18 inches is a
- nice width—because visibility isn't a problem, and you can use a deeper, waist-high shelf as you would a counter.
- ◆ Pay attention to lighting. Recessed spotlights can be great for display areas, while a hanging fixture is good at bouncing light around the space and into shelves.
- ◆ Set pretty containers on open shelving; less attractive items can go behind doors or in the less visible corners.
- ◆ Look for ways to carve up and organize the space inside the pantry: baskets in different shapes, wooden boxes, mini shelf inserts, trays, and lazy Susans. ◆

Baking a Chocolate-Hazelnut *Dacquoise*

The success of this delectable French cake lies in mastering meringue and mousse

BY SUSAN G. PURDY



One of my favorite classic French cakes is the *dacquoise*. Translated, *dacquoise* just means “from the town of Dax,” but to me, *dacquoise* means “luscious”—layers of light, crispy almond meringue (sometimes with hazelnuts added, too) that are sandwiched with layers of silky whipped cream or buttercream.

But my version of *dacquoise* (pronounced dah-KWAHZ) has a few small variations from the classic, and I think they work really well. For the meringue disks, I’m using just hazelnuts because I love their rich, almost smoky flavor. And instead of a buttercream filling, I’ve opted for a chocolate mousse. Although it’s rich, I think it feels lighter and creamier, and it plays beautifully against the crisp, nutty cake. Since *dacquoise* is all about contrasts,

Prepare the baking sheets



On two large sheets of parchment, use an 8-inch template (a tart pan or a cake circle is good) to trace two circles on each sheet, 1 inch apart. Dab the corners of two baking sheets with butter. Press each sheet of parchment, marked side down, onto a baking sheet to make it stick. Lightly butter and flour the parchment.

Grind the hazelnuts and sugar



In a food processor, pulse the 5 ounces of hazelnuts with the granulated sugar to a fine, dry meal. Measure 1 cup; reserve the rest for garnishing the cake. Position the oven racks to divide the oven into thirds and heat the oven to 275°F.



Sift together $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the superfine sugar and the cornstarch into a bowl. Stir in the cup of ground nut mixture and set aside.

perfect texture of every component is key. And properly whipped egg whites are crucial to the texture of both the meringue disks and the chocolate mousse.

All the components are do-ahead

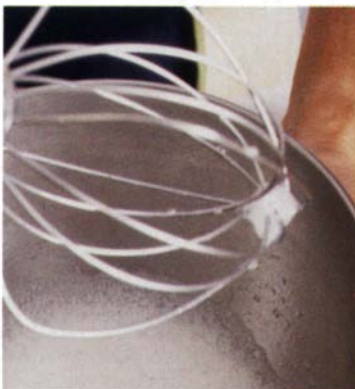
This dessert is great for entertaining because you can make the components days before you're ready to serve the cake, and you can assemble it the morning of the day you plan to serve it. In fact, I recommend making the cake over at least a two-day stretch—there's a lot of work involved. The meringue disks keep for several days stored airtight at room temperature, and the mousse keeps for three days in the refrigerator. In cool, dry weather, the candied hazelnuts look fine after a week, uncovered at room temperature. (In humid weather, refrigerate the glazed nuts.)

Properly beaten egg whites give *dacquoise* its airy structure

For both the meringue disks and the mousse, you'll be whipping egg whites first until foamy, and then until they form medium-stiff peaks, as in the photos at right.

Room-temperature egg whites whip up fuller than cold ones. This is because the surface tension is lower in a warmer white, making it easier for air to get in. But eggs separate most easily when they're cold,

Whip the whites into a meringue



Combine the egg whites with the cream of tartar and salt; whip on medium speed until foamy.



Increase the speed to medium high and gradually add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup superfine sugar. Whip until glossy and smooth and medium-stiff peaks form. During the last few turns to the whisk, add the vanilla and turn the speed to high.



In four or five additions, fold in the nut-sugar mixture, sprinkling and then folding gently so you don't deflate the foam.

Pipe the *dacquoise* disks and bake until crisp but still pale



Scoop the *dacquoise* batter into a pastry bag fitted with a 1/2-inch plain round tip. Push the mixture toward the tip and twist the bag closed. Arrange the parchment-covered sheets on your work surface.



Mark the center of each circle with a dot of batter. Starting at the center, pipe the meringue in a continuous spiral until you touch the outer edge. Repeat with the remaining three circles. Also pipe a few 3-inch spiral cookies; you'll use these to test for doneness.



Smooth any gaps with a toothpick. Bake in the heated oven until the disks feel dry but are still quite pale. Check the oven after 20 minutes; if browning is apparent, reduce the heat to 250°F and continue baking for about 80 minutes total.



Test for doneness by breaking one cooled cookie in half. If it's evenly crisp throughout, the disks are ready. If it's still a little soft inside, bake the disks about 10 minutes longer without raising the heat. Slide the parchment onto racks. Cool the disks completely and then gently peel off the parchment.

so if you need to warm up cool egg whites, put them in a bowl and set that bowl a warm water bath, stirring until the whites feel tepid. (Don't do this until just before using, however; the more time out of the fridge, the more time for bacteria to develop.)

Wipe any hint of grease from your equipment. Use metal or glass mixing bowls rather than plastic, which may trap grease. A grease-free bowl is important because the whites may not whip up fully if there's any fat present. To make sure, I like to wipe the bowl and beaters with a paper towel dampened with a little white vinegar. And the small amount of cream of tartar I add to the whites helps make the meringue more stable.

Slowly adding the sugar after the whites start to foam gives them volume. If you add the sugar too soon, it will liquefy and prevent foaming. Superfine sugar is the best choice here because it dissolves more quickly than granulated. If you don't have any

superfine sugar on hand, you can make your own by whirling granulated sugar in the food processor.

You'll whip the egg whites to medium-stiff peaks. Check the photos on p. 67. I'm using the words "medium-stiff" as a cautionary note here, because it's important to stay clear of overwhipping, which can happen if you go for really stiff peaks.

When you overwhip egg whites, the protein bonds weaken, moisture evaporates, and the mixture looks dull and clumpy. It will be hard to fold the other ingredients into overwhipped whites, and you'll get neither light, crisp meringues nor a light, silky mousse.

Use several cues to tell when you're finished mixing. First, the egg white and sugar mixture should look satiny-smooth and glossy. The beaters should mark tracks. Turn the mixer off and raise the beater—the whites at the tip should form a peak that stands straight up.

Egg whites aerated until firm and glossy are essential for both the meringue and the mousse.

Trim the cake layers



Set your tracing template gently on top of each disk. Without pressing down, cut around the edge with a sharp paring knife, shaving away uneven edges (reserve the trimmings). Store the layers between sheets of parchment in an airtight container until you assemble the cake. Crush the disk trimmings into coarse crumbs; add them to the reserved ground nuts.

Another good test, although it looks a little daredevil if you've never tried it, is to turn the mixing bowl upside down. Properly aerated egg whites will stay put in an inverted bowl.

Greased and floured parchment gives you extra insurance against sticking. Removing the delicate baked meringue layers needs to be easy so the disks don't break, and sugary meringue can be quite sticky. Greased, floured baking sheets usually work fine, but I prefer lining baking sheets with greased and floured parchment, which peels right off the baked disks.

Crisp meringue needs a gentle oven. You want to avoid caramelizing the sugar in the meringue and thus browning the disks; ideally, the disks should remain ivory or pale beige. Peek in the oven after about 20 minutes to check on the color; if the meringue is beginning to darken, lower the heat by 25 degrees. After 20 minutes of baking time, you can even turn the heat off and leave the disks in the oven for several hours or overnight. The disks crisp as they cool.

Chocolate mousse makes a silky filling

The mousse includes both whipped egg whites and whipped cream, making it rich but still light in

Make the chocolate mousse



Melt the chocolate and the butter over simmering water. When most of the chocolate has melted, remove from the heat, stir until smooth, and set aside for about 5 minutes to cool to 100°F on an instant-read thermometer. Beat hard until perfectly smooth. Whisk in the four egg yolks one at a time. Set the mixture aside to cool.



Beat the four egg whites with the salt until foamy. Gradually add the 3 tablespoons superfine sugar and beat until the whites are glossy and smooth and medium-stiff peaks form. The beater should mark tracks in the mixture.



When the chocolate feels slightly cooler than body temperature, stir about a quarter of the whipped whites into the chocolate to lighten it. Fold this chocolate mixture into the remaining whites in three or four additions, laying the chocolate across the top, folding gently, and scraping the sides and bottom as needed.

In a chilled bowl with chilled beaters, whip the cream until firm peaks form. During the last moment, add the vanilla. Fold the whipped cream into the cooled chocolate mixture; it's fine if it's slightly streaked when you're done folding. Refrigerate, covered, at least 3 hours but no longer than 2 days.



Glaze the hazelnuts



Gently poke a pointy wooden toothpick into the bottom of each hazelnut at the point slightly off the center junction of the bottom lobes so the nut won't split. Insert it just enough to grab or the nut will split. Prepare a shallow hot water bath.



In a small, deep saucepan, combine the sugar, water, and cream of tartar. Set over medium heat and cook, swirling but not stirring, until the sugar is dissolved and the syrup is clear. Wash down the pan sides with a pastry brush dipped in cold water. Raise the heat to medium high and boil the syrup, swirling the pan but not stirring.



Cook until the syrup turns light amber, about 10 minutes. Immediately remove the pot from the heat and set it into the water bath. Let sit until the bubbling subsides (not more than 15 minutes). Tilt the pan and carefully dip the nuts into the syrup, twirling as you remove them. Stick them upright in an apple to dry, being careful not to drip the hot caramel on your fingers. If it's humid, refrigerate the nuts and apples.

Assemble the



Put a dab of mousse in the center of a foil-covered cardboard cake circle or a tart pan bottom. Center a dacquoise disk on top.

texture and not too intensely chocolatey. In addition to proper whipping technique, respecting temperatures is key to a good chocolate mousse. (Please note that this recipe is based on a classic recipe and does include raw eggs).

The double boiler should be over—not touching—simmering water. Overheating can cause chocolate to burn or separate. Be sure the chocolate has cooled to near body temperature before you add it to the whipped whites. Warm chocolate can deflate the whipped whites and melt the whipped cream.

If you like experimenting with flavors in chocolate, try substituting a half teaspoon of orange, almond, or coffee extract for the teaspoon of vanilla extract, or use two tablespoons of a liqueur such as Grand Marnier or Frangelico.

Candied hazelnuts make a pretty garnish

You'll make more caramel syrup than you'll actually use for dipping because the larger amount will stay liquefied longer during dipping. To spear the nuts for dipping, use a pointy toothpick, rather than the flat-edged kind. The best place to insert the toothpick is slightly off-center, in the fatter bottom area of one of the four lobes; this way, the nut won't crack open.

RECIPE

Hazelnut Dacquoise with Chocolate Mousse & Candied Hazelnuts

For this recipe, you'll need a couple of pieces of special equipment: a pastry bag with a ½-inch plain tip and a ¼-inch star tip; an 8-inch tracing template, such as a tart pan bottom or a cardboard cake circle; and pointy wooden toothpicks (the flat-sided kind don't work) for spearing the hazelnuts. *Yields four 8-inch layers, plus three cookies for doneness testing, 7 cups mousse, and 12 candied hazelnuts.*

FOR THE DACQUOISE LAYERS:

Softened butter or vegetable spray and flour for the parchment

5 oz. (1 cup) whole hazelnuts, toasted and skinned (or use whole blanched hazelnuts, toasted)

2 Tbs. granulated sugar

1 ¼ cups sifted superfine sugar, divided into ¾-cup and ½-cup portions

2 Tbs. sifted cornstarch

6 large egg whites, at room temperature

¼ tsp. cream of tartar

⅛ tsp. salt

1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

layers and decorate the cake



Spread $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mousse on the disk. Top with another disk and repeat with all the disks (ending with a disk), making sure the stack is straight. After using all the disks, refrigerate the cake and remaining mousse for about 15 minutes to firm up.



Spread a cup of mousse around the cake sides and another cup over the top. If the cake starts to melt or slide as you frost it, return it to the refrigerator.



Scoop up the nut-crumb mixture and gently press it onto the bottom of the cake sides, going two-thirds of the way up all around the cake.

FOR THE MOUSSE:

10 oz. best-quality bittersweet chocolate
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut up
4 large eggs, separated, at room temperature
Pinch salt
3 Tbs. superfine sugar
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream, well chilled
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

FOR THE HAZELNUTS:

12 whole hazelnuts, toasted and skinned (or use whole blanched hazelnuts, toasted), plus extra in case of breakage
1 cup granulated sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
Pinch cream of tartar

Review the text and then follow the photos and captions starting on p. 66.

*Susan G. Purdy lives in Roxbury, Connecticut. She's the author of *Have Your Cake & Eat It Too* and *Let Them Eat Cake* (both from William Morrow). Her other books include *A Piece of Cake* (Macmillan) and *As Easy as Pie* (Atheneum). ♦*



Fit a pastry bag with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch star tip, fill with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mousse, and pipe twelve $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch rosettes, spaced evenly, around the edge of the cake top. Refrigerate for at least an hour (or up to 7 hours).



Just before serving, top each rosette with a candied hazelnut. Cut the cake with a sharp, thin knife.

Fresh vs. dry yeasts

The new kinds of dry yeast boast convenience and faster rising times, but many bakers still choose traditional fresh yeast. I like fresh yeast because it dissolves in warm liquid without much prodding, and because it

seems to give a steadier rise.

Of the dry yeasts, instant and quick rise are relatively new products and thus not always available, the way active dry is. They can be added directly to dry ingredients without proofing, and they rise faster (although I often prefer the flavor that develops from a slower rise).

For all types of yeast, cooler temperatures retard their growth, while very high temperatures (over 140°F) kill them. Always

check the expiration date before buying and using any kind of yeast. Once a package has been opened, store it in an airtight container.

—Molly Stevens, contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*



Fresh yeast should be smooth, almost rubbery feeling. If it's discolored, hard, or moldy (inset), get rid of it.

Figure out how much to use, whether to proof, and when to choose one over another

type of yeast	forms sold	equivalent amounts	using	storage/shelf life	other notes
FRESH (also called compressed or cake, for its shape)	refrigerated, foil-wrapped 0.6-oz. cubes, and 1-lb. blocks	1 cube fresh equals 1 packet (2¼ tsp.) active dry or quick rise or ¾ of 1 packet of instant	proof by crumbling yeast into ¼ cup of 95°F water with a pinch of sugar; liquid should turn milky and foam slightly; then add to other ingredients	2 weeks refrigerated; 6 months frozen; should be soft, smooth, pale-colored; turns hard, cracked, and discolored when old	provides a very strong and steady rise, especially good for long-rising breads
DRY active	sealed, foil-lined ¼-oz. packets (often in strips of 3), and in tinted 4-oz. jars	1 packet (2¼ tsp.) active dry equals 1 cube fresh, 1 packet quick rise, or ¾ of 1 packet instant	dissolve in ¼ cup of 105° to 115°F water, with or without a pinch of sugar; liquid will bubble, proving the yeast is active; then add to other ingredients	1 year refrigerated; longer frozen	most widely available form of yeast; some say it provides a pleasant "yeastier" flavor
instant (also called European)	sealed, foil-lined ¼-oz. packets, and in 500g vacuum-sealed bags	¾ of 1 packet (1½ to 2 tsp.) instant equals 1 packet active dry or quick rise, or 1 cube fresh	add directly to dry ingredients; no proofing necessary*; liquids used should be 90° to 95°F	1 year refrigerated; longer frozen	a stronger, more reliable strain of dry yeast developed for commercial bakers and now available to home cooks
quick rise (also called rapid rise)	sealed, foil-lined ¼-oz. packets, and in tinted 4-oz. jars	1 packet (2¼ tsp.) quick rise equals 1 packet active dry, 1 cube fresh, or ¾ of 1 packet instant	add directly to dry ingredients; no proofing necessary*; liquids used should be 120° to 130°F; after kneading, let dough rest for 10 to 15 minutes and then immediately shape into loaves for one rise only	1 year refrigerated; longer frozen	bread rises twice as fast, eliminating the second rising period, but means less time for flavor to develop

*proofing actually weakens this type of yeast

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How to trim a whole beef filet

To learn how to trim a beef tenderloin, I watched the expert butchers at Savor's, a gourmet grocery in Boston. They make it look really easy. When I tried doing it myself, I found that my tenderloin wasn't quite as beautiful as theirs, but that with a good, sharp knife, I could do a respectable job.

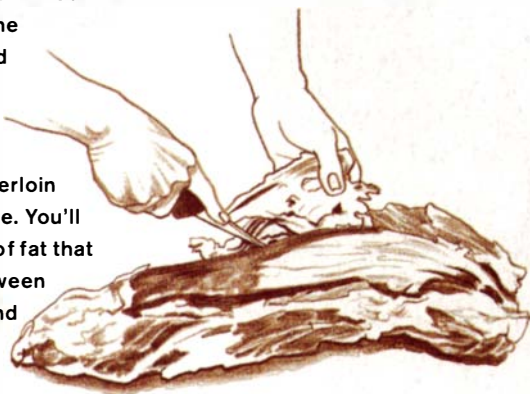
Begin by opening the plastic bag containing the meat over the sink and draining off any liquid. Set the filet on a cutting board with the most fatty side facing up, and then follow the directions below.

Once the meat is trimmed, you can cut it into two large roasts as directed in the article on p. 32, or you can cut and tie one roast and slice the rest of the tenderloin into steaks to freeze for later use. When cutting steaks, use a sharp knife to slice through the meat with a few clean strokes; don't saw back and forth.

—Joanne Smart, associate editor for Fine Cooking

1. Pull off fat and sinew. Use

a knife to make cuts in the deep, soft fat (also called suet) and then use your fingers to pull off all the fat and any loose membrane. Flip the tenderloin over to trim the other side. You'll also find large deposits of fat that need to be cut away between the lobes of the larger end of the tenderloin.



2. Look for the thin strip of fat-covered meat running along one side of the filet. Cut and completely pull away this strip, also called the chain.



3. Trim the chain and save it for future use.

Once trimmed, you can use this meat to flavor stocks and soups, to add to a stew, or to slice for a stir-fry. Some butchers tie this piece back onto the roast, which is fine (don't bother removing it if it's already tied on) but of little benefit to the roast.



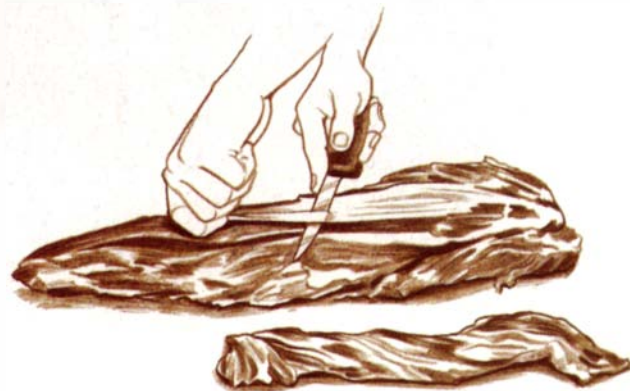
Toast nuts to give them

Whether you're using pine nuts in salads or walnuts in cookie dough, a gentle toasting intensifies the nuts' flavor and maximizes their crunchiness.

The simplest way to toast a lot of nuts is in a medium oven (325° to 375°F). Spread them in a single layer on a baking sheet with a rim (to keep wayward nuts from diving off the edge). If the nuts don't fit in a single layer, use two pans. Stay close by, and give the nuts a stir every few minutes.

The nuts will be ready in 5 to 10 minutes; small nuts like pistachios will toast much faster than a batch of big Brazil nuts. You'll know they're done when they're lightly browned and that comforting, nutty smell fills the air. Cut one or two in half; they should be an even pale brown throughout.

To toast just a handful of nuts, use a dry skillet over medium heat. The skillet method is faster since you won't have to wait for the oven to heat up, but it also demands more attentiveness. You'll need to shake and stir pretty constantly to



4. Remove the silverskin completely. The silverskin, a whitish, silvery membrane, must be removed. Begin by sliding the knife blade $\frac{1}{16}$ inch under the silverskin, cutting a small "tab" of silverskin. Grab the loosened tab and pull it taut. With the blade just barely resting on the meat, cut off a strip of the silverskin all the way to the end of the filet, keeping the blade parallel to the meat, as shown above. Remove as many strips as needed to completely remove the silverskin.

more flavor and crunch

avoid dark or burnt spots. A toaster oven is also convenient for small amounts.

If the nuts look and smell done but seem somewhat soft, don't worry. Freshly toasted nuts dry and firm as they cool. They'll also continue to brown slightly off the heat, so it's better to remove them sooner than later. Be especially vigilant if the nuts will be added to a dish that requires further cooking: burnt nuts taste acrid and unpleasant.

Immediately transfer the nuts from the hot pan to halt their cooking. If you plan to chop the nuts in a food processor or pulverize them in a blender, first let them cool completely. When still warm, their oils are runny, and you may end up with nut butter.

Finally, toasted nuts have a shorter shelf life than raw nuts because the heat breaks down the nut oils, making them more prone to rancidity. Store toasted nuts, tightly covered, in a cool, dry spot, and use them within a week or two.


—Molly Stevens



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A Mix of Flavors from Morocco

Nowhere is the wide variety of ingredients used in Moroccan cooking on more tempting display than at a weekly *souk*. At these open-air markets, aromas from the spice stalls entice shoppers with mounds of cinnamon, ground ginger (Moroccans don't use fresh ginger), nutmeg, cloves, and mace. Jars filled with sweet red paprika and golden turmeric share shelf space with burlap bags overflowing with peppercorns and cumin seeds.

The complexity of flavors that characterizes Moroccan cuisine reflects many cultural influences in the region. But even though Moroccan cooking enlists a wide variety of spices—*ras el hanout*, the most exotic blend, may include over 30 ingredients—you can capture the essence of Moroccan cooking without a visit to a North African *souk*.

Familiar ingredients combine intriguingly

The handful of spices I use the most—cumin, sweet paprika, saffron, cinnamon, ground ginger, and black pepper—are probably already in your spice rack. What may seem unusual is that these spices are often used in combination to add exquisite depth to many Moroccan dishes, for example, the stews called *tagines*.

A penchant for mixing sweet with savory. Other familiar flavors playing unusual roles include fresh and dried fruits and honey. These sweet ingredients are often

added to meat dishes, such as lamb simmered with honey and cinnamon. Such wonderfully rich dishes are often saved from being cloying by the generous addition of black pepper and a touch of cayenne. This “sweet heat” is a hallmark of Moroccan *tagines*.

Perhaps the most famous pairing of savory and sweet is found in the lavish, uniquely Moroccan dish called *b'stila* (or *bastila*) in which shredded pigeon, ground almonds, confectioners' sugar, and cinnamon are layered within a phyllo-like dough called *ourka*.

In *b'stila*, as in many other Moroccan dishes, saffron and

turmeric give the filling flavor as well as a golden hue. To bring out the saffron's flavor, I often toast the threads lightly before adding them to a dish.

Tangy, spicy, and pungent flavors round out the cuisine. Another distinctly North African flavor is *charmoula*, a potent purée of garlic, paprika, cumin, lemon juice, olive oil, and cilantro that's used as a marinade and as a sauce.

Back at the *souk*, you'll find piles of preserved lemons and plastic tubs filled with dry-cured black olives and

delicious purple and green olives. Seasoned a dozen different ways, olives often serve as appetizers or as one of the main flavorings in *tagines* or salads.

Preserved lemons—the most important Moroccan condiment. From time spent packed in salt, the lemon's rind turns tender enough to eat, the pulp becomes almost jam-like, and the lemon flavor is intensified. Preserved lemons add a delicious tartness to meat, poultry, or fish *tagines*; they're also wonderful sliced in salads. The pulp is often puréed with the sauce of a dish and the rind added at the end of cooking. (For my recipe for preserved lemons, see p. 54.)

Finally, no consideration of Moroccan cooking is complete without mentioning *atay b'nahna*, a strong, sweet mint tea that is Morocco's national drink (to make it, see the sidebar at left).

Kitty Morse's latest books include *Cooking at the Kasbah: Recipes from My Moroccan Kitchen* (Chronicle Books) and *A Biblical Feast* (Ten Speed Press). ♦

Try the tastes of Morocco

- ♦ Rub beef or lamb with a mixture of olive oil, garlic, and cumin before roasting or grilling.
- ♦ Serve chickpeas as a side dish seasoned with a dash of cumin, some sweet paprika, and olive oil.
- ♦ Toss diced roasted peppers with a little olive oil, ground cumin, chopped garlic, and diced preserved lemon rind.
- ♦ Make *charmoula* by combining ¼ cup olive oil, a minced garlic clove, a teaspoon of ground cumin, and a tablespoon each of sweet Hungarian paprika, finely chopped cilantro, and fresh lemon juice. Use as a marinade for lamb, beef, chicken, or seafood, or as a sauce for vegetables.
- ♦ Brew a teaspoon of Chinese green tea with 2½ cups water. While the tea steeps, add a half dozen or so sprigs of mint. Add sugar to taste (Moroccans like it very sweet) and serve hot.



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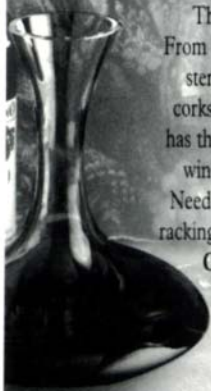
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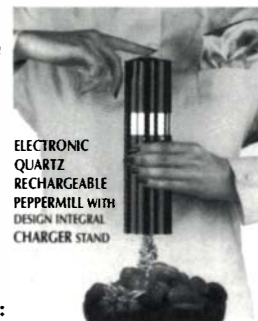
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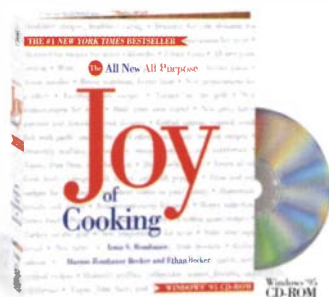
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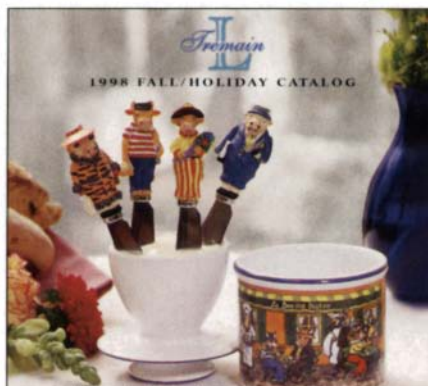
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Steam Makes a Better Loaf of Bread, Inside and Outside

Many cooks and bakers know that using steam at the beginning of the baking process helps make a better loaf of bread, but most assume that the steam just helps form a good crust. Not so. Steam does affect the crust, but it also has another vital role. A steamy oven at the beginning of baking helps the loaves reach maximum volume, which means they'll have a good shape and a good interior crumb structure.

When bread goes into a hot oven, a fight begins between the action of the yeast and the setting of the top of the dough. Heat from the bottom warms the dough and the yeast becomes wildly active. Also, the liquid alcohol in the dough (which the yeast has given off from the beginning) gets warm enough to change into a gas. The increased activity of the yeast before it is killed by heat, plus gas from the alcohol, create a sudden great rise which bakers call "oven spring." The loaf increases in volume by about a third.

Unfortunately, the instant a loaf goes into the oven, the hot, dry air starts forming a crust on the dough. This can hold the loaf down and dramatically interfere with oven spring. If, however, the oven is filled with steam, the moisture keeps the dough soft and pliable, and the loaf can then rise freely.

To prevent early crust- ing, you want the loaf well away from the hot top of the oven. The combination of higher heat from the bottom and a really steamy oven for the first 5 to 10 minutes of baking allows breads to rise to their maximum.

As most people know, the crust does benefit from steam—you get better flavor, color and texture. The moisture provides more liquid for greater swelling of surface starch granules. For a brief period before they are killed by heat, enzymes break down some of the starch in these swollen granules into sugars and dextrins (sugar-related compounds).

Start with a good hit of steam for a browner, crisper crust and better volume for the whole loaf.

These sugars enhance browning. A little above 330°F, sugars caramelize and break down into the wonderfully flavorful compounds that we associate with caramel. Depending on the amount of protein in the flour and the amount of certain sugars (reducing sugars), a type of browning, called the Maillard reactions, also occurs at much lower temperatures as long as the dough isn't too acidic. (See

rectangular or round pizza stones, which are available in cookware shops, can give you a very good hearth-type surface. You can heat a stone on the lowest shelf or on the oven floor, or on a shelf just above the heating element in an electric oven. This provides an excellent, evenly heated hot surface to warm the dough fast and start its rapid rise well away from the hot top of the oven that



A steamy oven makes a plump loaf. The moisture keeps the outer skin of the dough extensible so the expanding gases on the inside can help the loaf "spring up."

Fine Cooking #27, p. 88, for more on this type of browning.) The crust will be crisper, too, if the starch granules are fully swollen.

To produce light, crusty French-style and rustic breads at home, providing enough steam is a challenge. Large

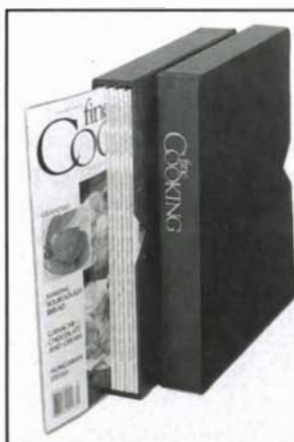
would form a crust and hold it down.

I like using baker Peter Reinhart's method of heating an empty pan along with the stone and then adding a cup of boiling water to the hot pan just as you add the bread. You can also mist the loaf itself before it goes into the oven.

Leaving the oven open long enough for even a quick mist reduces the temperature, so you need to heat the oven 50 degrees higher than the desired baking temperature. As soon as the loaf and the boiling water are in the oven and the misting is complete, close the door and turn the oven down to the baking temperature.

After maximum rise is achieved, loaves need a hot, dry oven to bake through and crisp the crust properly.

Food scientist Shirley O. Corriher, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of the award-winning Cook Wise (William Morrow). ♦



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Ten Not-to-Miss Cookbooks from 1998

I have to admit that being *Fine Cooking's* book review editor is not a bad job. Every day is like Christmas for me: When the mail arrives, I sit down with my coffee cup in one hand, X-Acto knife in the other, and rip open a pile of padded envelopes.

Many of the books inside those envelopes are disappointingly mediocre, but when I do find a really inspiring one, I want to let *Fine Cooking* readers know about it. We only have room to review one book in depth each issue, so we've come up with a way to let you know about some of the other good books we've noticed this year: a year-end, holiday give-and-receive suggestion list of ten great books for cooks.

I liked *Every Grain of Rice: A Taste of Our Chinese Childhood in America*, by Ellen Blonder and Annabel Low, the minute I saw its charming watercolor illustrations. I liked it even better when I read why these two authors, an aunt and a niece born 16 days apart who became friends for life, decided to write this book—to pass along a bit of their parents' culinary heritage to their own children.

To recreate the favorite food of their Chinese-American childhood, Low and Blonder turned to their families for help with making wonton soup, Uncle Joe's chow mein, *ha gow* (dumplings), batter-fried prawns, black bean spareribs, and sweet-and-sour whole fish (a recipe from Low's father's restaurant, the Hong Kong Cafe). Once they felt they had mastered a dish, they fine-tuned it to make the recipe easy for anyone to follow.

The night I made Steamed Fish in Black Bean Sauce, Sesame Spinach, and Basic Steamed Rice (when I learned that Chinese cooks always rinse rice thoroughly before cooking), I felt like I was dining in the best of Chinese restaurants. Another night, thanks to them, I finally discovered the secret to good fried rice—really high heat. Learning new techniques was a bonus to this lovely book full of good food.

My rice education continued with *Seductions of Rice*, by Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid, the husband-and-wife photographers who won acclaim for their first cookbook, *Flatbreads & Flavors*, in 1995. *Seductions of Rice* grabs you with 200 stunning photos from rice-growing

regions all over the world (from Senegal to Japan), where Duguid and Alford lived and travelled with their sons to document the culture of rice.

But it's the authors' anecdotes (helping to harvest sticky rice on a cool November morning in Thailand, eating hot rice congee at the People's Restaurant in China during a raging flood) and their 200 delicious and straightforward recipes that round out this book. The recipes, organized by region, include traditional rice dishes like risotto, paella, and sushi, as well as delicious curries and stir-fries to serve with rice. I loved a soothing Beef & Lettuce Congee and a simple Summer Stir-Fry of veggies and peanuts.

This was a good year for single subjects. *Fine Cooking* contributing editor James Peterson wrote *Vegetables*, and though I tried hard to be a critical reviewer, I couldn't find much wrong with it; in fact, I loved it. If this book doesn't help cooks find delicious ways to prepare vegetables, I don't know what will.

The first section is packed with detailed information on how to shop, store, and prepare all kinds of vegetables (there's a whole sidebar, for example, on peeling, chopping, and crushing garlic). Here you'll find starter recipes, too, like Baked Potatoes and Basic Sautéed Eggplant, as well as a section of handsome color photos, which Peterson took himself, including technique photos for difficult tasks like trimming artichokes.

The second half of the book is a bonus of hundreds of recipes, with a nice range of American favorites and ethnic dishes. I made a lovely Japanese salad of thinly sliced vegetables and an Indian



Photos: Scott Phillips

Curried Split Pea Soup with lots of tomatoes. I especially liked a simple Tomato Gratin with Bread, Cream & Bacon (although I'm too lazy to peel and seed tomatoes, much as Peterson would like us to).

Equally engaging but on a very different topic is *The Complete Meat Cookbook*, by Bruce Aidells and Denis Kelly. These two Californians, authors of *Hot Links & Country Flavors*, have such a light-hearted, no-nonsense approach to the topic ("Frankly, we love meat") that you can't help being swept along by their enthusiasm. I laughed out loud at their discussion of how primitive man's brain size started to grow once he began eating meat.

I was entertained, but also informed. I finally learned to sort out the USDA meat-grading system, and I got a ton of good tips on buying and cooking meat. But the proof that these guys really love meat was their tasty recipes: my husband and I happily lived off Cuban Roast Pork for the better part of a week,

grilled Bourbon-Marinated Top Round Steak the next weekend, and then moved on to Nogales Steak Tacos with lime-pickled red onions and guacamole.

Normally I'd be skeptical of a book titled *How to Cook Everything*, but when I learned that the *New York Times* "Minimalist" columnist Mark Bittman was writing it, I

had to take a look. Reading his introduction, I found that Bittman's goal is to convince everyone that cooking is a simple, everyday art, and that we're all capable of making easy, satisfying meals for friends and family. He disdains the extremes that cooking has fallen to (the "convenience" crowd thinks that reheating packaged stuff is cooking; "gourmets," on the other

hand, have tried to turn cooking into a form of high art that can only be performed occasionally and elaborately for a crowd). Bittman feels that with the abundance of fresh food available to us in our markets, we can all get delicious meals on the table every night without a lot of hoopla.

And then he backs up his premise with 1,500 examples.

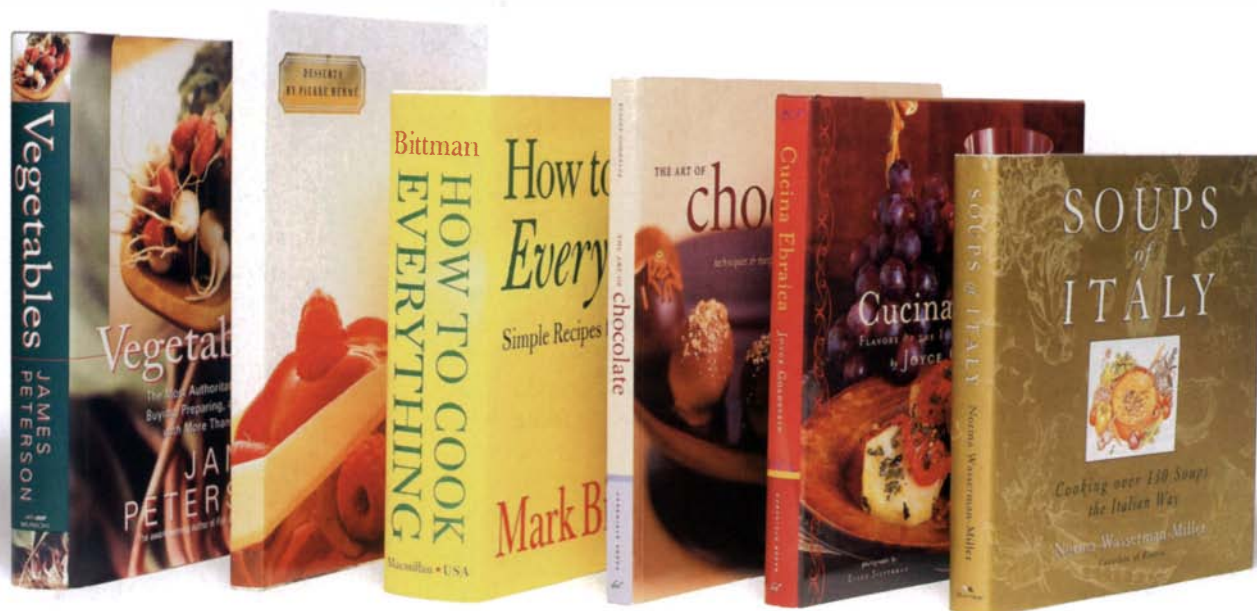
Amidst the stacks of so-so cookbooks, these gems really shine with an honest passion for cooking.

His recipes are all refreshing because they reflect modern tastes; the appetizer section, for example, is defined by recipes that everyone wants to have, such as Guacamole, Hummus, and Tapenade. The other chapters follow suit with recipes for Salade Niçoise, Spaghetti alla Carbonara, Grilled Pizza, Roast Turkey & Gravy, Cassoulet, and Chocolate Soufflé. Bittman has a

rare gift for writing uncomplicated recipes, and amazingly, a huge percentage of these recipes can be prepared in little more than a half hour. And many recipes come with options: Bittman gives you the tools to prepare something, and then he offers many different ways to flavor it.

Cooks at all levels will get a lot out of this book. One day I turned to the book to learn how to peel and cook plantains; another day I made a quick dinner of moist seared cod fillet with a spicy garlic sauce, following Bittman's instructions. An excellent glossary, temperature and measurement charts, menu suggestions, sources, and 250 black-and-white illustrations all make this nearly 1,000-page book worth much more than its \$25.

I know that we've seen a ton of Italian cookbooks over the last few years, but despite the glut, I put three new ones on my list. When I heard that chef Joyce Goldstein was writing *Cucina Ebraica: Flavors of the Italian-Jewish Kitchen*,



I knew that it would be fascinating and delicious. It certainly is both.

Jews arrived in Italy centuries ago, and through the years have brought cooking traditions from other parts of the Mediterranean, especially Spain, and the Middle East. Goldstein researched those traditions, tracked down recipes in old Italian cookbooks and from family recipe cards, and turned these into mouth-watering dishes like Crostini with Cheeses & Hazelnuts, Polenta Anchovy Fritters, Artichokes Roman Style with Mint & Garlic, Fish with Walnut Sauce, and Braised Lamb with Olives. I made an incredibly delicious braised chicken with herbs, tomatoes, and olives (Ezekiel's Chicken) and served it with her easy polenta. My only complaint of the book is a rather busy design with a hard-to-read recipe format. But Ellen Silverman's rich photos help make up for that.

Norma Wasserman-Miller has also done her research in *Soups of Italy*. She gives us a wonderful overview of how Italian soups originated with peasant cooking centuries ago, and how they evolved into the Italian classics known today as *minestra* (broth soups with rice or pasta), *zuppa* (rustic soups usually served over bread), *pancotto* (mostly vegetable soups, always thickened with "cooked bread"), *minestrone* (the "big soups" fortified with legumes and grains), and *crema* (thick, puréed soups).

Then she goes on to explain that all Italian soups are built with layers of flavors: first, the *battuto*, finely chopped aromatic ingredients, often sautéed and called a *soffritto*; next the *sapori*, the soup's main ingredients; then the *brodo*, or broth; and finally the *condimenti*, or additions.

Each recipe uses these flavor-building blocks, so by making just a few of them, you automatically learn the techniques for making a tasty Italian soup. Since I love legumes, I made Lentil & Pumpkin Soup with Pancetta as well as Porcini & Eggplant Minestrone. I loved them both, but there are many more, such as Yellow Pepper Bread Soup and Fennel & Shallot Soup with Arugula, that I want to try.

It seems silly to tell you about *Rao's Cookbook: 100 Years of Italian Home Cooking*, as I'm sure you've seen this highly publicized book by now. But in case you haven't, I've got to tell you, for once a marketing blitz is backed by the real thing. This is a really charming book; you can't help feeling good when you read the success story of this 100-year-old East Harlem Italian "joint," and when you try the food, you know why the place has been such a hit for so long.

This is uncomplicated, easy-to-make food that uses

the best ingredients. No one can argue with a delicious marinara, a comforting soup of escarole and white beans that comes together in 20 minutes, or the delightfully sticky Rao's Famous Lemon Chicken. The Orecchiette with Broccoli Rabe & Sausage is the kind of pasta dish I could eat every night; the Fresh Clam Zuppa is marvelous. Black-and-white and color photos, along with recollections from the "regulars" at Rao's, make you feel as if you've eaten there—which is lucky, since reservations are harder to get than a seat on the space shuttle.

If you want to bump your baking skills up a notch, two just-published books are for you: *The Art of Chocolate*, by Elaine González and *Desserts by Pierre Hermé*, by Dorie Greenspan. *The Art of Chocolate* is a gift from a very talented teacher who knows how to explain the intricacies of working with chocolate. One of my fellow editors, who's been researching chocolate

making, said González's instructions for tempering were the best she had read, and that in fact the whole book was very thorough and well-written. I believed her when she gave us a taste of a moist and delicious chocolate-orange torte she made from the book. Frankie Frankeny's color photos that accompany González's truffles, tortes, cakes, and candies are gorgeous, but I especially like the less glamorous but very informative technique photos that show perplexing tricks like how to shape a decorating bag out of kitchen parchment.

Desserts by Pierre Hermé, a collection of over 100 recipes from France's premier pastry chef, comes to us courtesy of award-winning American food writer Dorie Greenspan. Greenspan obviously enjoyed the time she spent with Hermé: she portrays him with humor and affection (here is a great pastry chef who's not afraid to put Rice Krispies in one of his desserts or to use olive oil in a cake). Luckily for us, she translates his recipes in a fashion so well-organized and easy to read (including plenty of troubleshooting advice from him) that even novices will want to try the "fundamental" recipes like Flourless Chocolate Cake Batter and Sweet Tart Dough or a simple refreshing dessert like Grapefruit Fans with Fresh Mint Granité. Advanced bakers can tackle more multifaceted desserts that carry names like Melody, Mozart, Riviera, and Carioca (a sexy chocolate and coffee French cake named for a sexy Brazilian dance). I think I'll just make the buttery Breton Sand Cookies.

Susie Middleton is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦

Every Grain of Rice, by Ellen Blonder & Annabel Low. Clarkson Potter. \$25, hardcover, 208 pp. ISBN 0-609-60102-4.
Seductions of Rice, by Jeffrey Alford & Naomi Duguid. Artisan. \$35, hardcover, 480 pp. ISBN 1-57965-113-5.
Vegetables, by James Peterson. William Morrow. \$35, hardcover, 430 pp. ISBN 0-688-14658-9.
The Complete Meat Cookbook, Bruce Aidells & Denis Kelly. Houghton Mifflin. \$35, hardcover, 608 pp. ISBN 0-395-90492-7.
How to Cook Everything, by Mark Bittman. Macmillan. \$25, hardcover, 944 pp. ISBN 0-02-861010-5.

Cucina Ebraica, by Joyce Goldstein. Chronicle. \$29.95, hardcover, 208 pp. ISBN 0-8118-1969-8.
Soups of Italy, by Norma Wasserman-Miller. William Morrow. \$25, hardcover, 310 pp. ISBN 0-688-15031-4.
Rao's Cookbook, by Frank Pellegrino. Random House. \$40, hardcover, 183 pp. ISBN 0-679-45749-6.
The Art of Chocolate, by Elaine González. Chronicle. \$22.95, softcover, 165 pp. ISBN 0-8118-1811-X.
Desserts by Pierre Hermé, by Dorie Greenspan. Little Brown. \$35, hardcover, 304 pp. ISBN 0-316-35720-0.

At the Market

Rocky Peanut Company (800/437-6825) stocks a wide selection of nuts, as does **Sultan's Delight** (800/852-5046 or www.sultansdelight.com).

For macadamia nuts, try **Melissa's** (800/588-1281 or www.melissas.com) or **Frieda's by Mail** (800/341-1771 or www.friedas.com).

Enjoying Wine

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The Vacu-Vin, Private Preserve wine saver, and the Château



Laguiole Sommelier corkscrew are available by calling the **Wine Enthusiast** (800/356-8466). Call 707/252-4258 to find retail locations for the **Private Preserve** wine saver. For where to buy The Waiter's Friend corkscrew, call **Le Creuset** at 800/827-1798.

Roasting a Beef Tenderloin

To order a prime beef tenderloin, call **Savenor's** in Boston at 617/723-6328, or **Dean & DeLuca** in New York at 800/221-7714.

For truffle oil, look in gourmet grocery stores or order from **Urbani** (718/392-5050), **Zingerman's** (888/636-8162), or **King Arthur Flour Baker's Catalogue** (800/827-6836).

Instant-read thermometers are sold in housewares stores and through cookware catalogs such as the **Chef's Catalog** (800/338-3232) and **A Cook's Wares** (800/915-9788).

Holiday Cookies

Buy a crinkled cookie cutter like the one Joanne Chang uses to

stamp the Coconut Sablés from **Sweet Celebrations** (800/328-6722), which also stocks wide parchment, racks, and spatulas.

Edible Gifts

Two excellent sources for spices are **Penzeys** (414/574-0277) and **Adriana's Caravan** (800/316-0820 or 718/436-8565).

Chocolate-Hazelnut Dacquoise

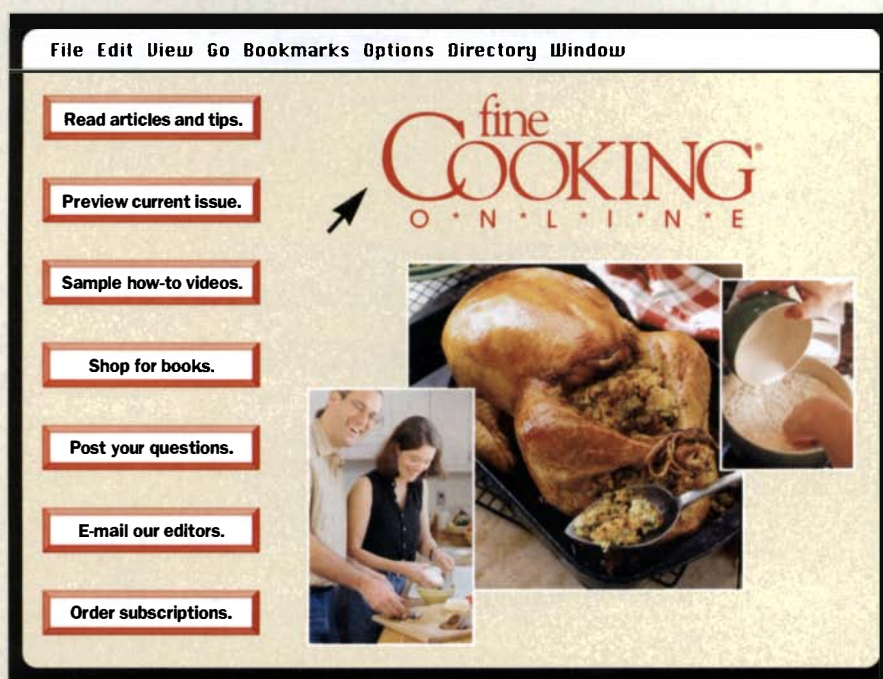
Sweet Celebrations (800/328-6722) carries wide parchment, cooling racks, and cake spatulas. For hazelnuts, call **Sultan's Delight** (800/437-6825) or visit www.sultansdelight.com.

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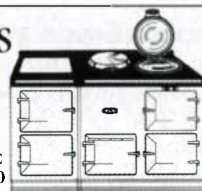
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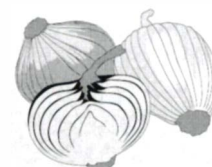
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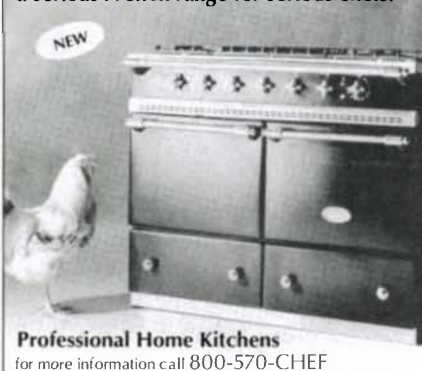
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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Roasted Filet of Beef	35	430	200	51	2	23	7	10	5	140	790	1	
Flageolet Beans with Tomatoes	36	240	70	10	33	8	1	5	1	0	400	10	
Roquefort Popovers	36	210	90	9	18	10	5	3	2	125	500	1	per popover
Mushroom, Endive & Green Bean Salad	37	100	80	2	6	9	1	7	1	0	230	3	
Orange-Soaked Bundt Cake	37	660	310	7	82	34	11	15	6	145	135	1	without garnish
Wild Mushroom Bread Pudding	40	380	210	12	30	23	13	7	1	150	780	3	based on 10 servings
Caramelized Onion Bread Pudding	40	450	310	7	28	35	16	12	4	170	610	2	based on 10 servings
Fennel & Sausage Bread Pudding	41	370	210	10	30	23	9	10	2	140	610	4	based on 10 servings
Potato Latkes	43	210	110	5	22	12	3	5	4	85	500	2	per latke
Applesauce	43	45	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	per ¼ cup
Roasted Vegetable Salad	47	620	450	8	40	50	8	32	8	5	820	6	
Chicken-Mesclun Salad	47	590	450	30	8	50	8	35	5	75	500	3	
Pork Tenderloin & Spinach Salad	48	580	330	35	29	36	6	20	9	85	730	5	
Shrimp & Vegetable Salad	48	330	230	11	16	26	4	6	15	65	300	4	
Coconut Sablés	50	60	35	1	5	4	2.5	1	0	10	15	0	per cookie
Toasted Almond Butter Thins	51	35	20	1	4	2.5	1	1	0.5	5	15	0	per cookie
Checkerboard Cookies	52	25	15	0	3	1.5	1	0.5	0	5	10	0	per cookie
Chocolate-Nut Wafers	53	40	25	1	4	2.5	1	1	0.5	5	15	0	per cookie
Green Olive & Almond Tapenade	55	50	45	1	1	5	0.5	3.5	0.5	0	135	1	per tablespoon
Chocolate Sauce	56	60	50	1	4	6	3	1	1	10	5	0	per tablespoon
Caramel Sauce	56	70	35	0	10	4	2.5	1	0	15	5	0	per tablespoon
Scallion Mustard	56	80	80	0	1	9	1	6	1	0	150	0	per tablespoon
Roasted Garlic Mustard	57	35	5	1	5	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	190	1	per tablespoon
Cranberry Mustard	57	30	10	0	5	1	0	0.5	0	0	50	1	per tablespoon
Rustic Whole-Wheat Walnut Bread	61	130	40	4	20	4.5	0.5	1	2.5	0	240	2	per slice
Hazelnut <i>Dacquoise</i>	70	430	300	7	33	33	15	12	2	110	105	1	based on 12 servings
Lamb Chops & Onion-Tomato Compote	98	430	180	50	13	20	6	11	2	180	700	2	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

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Spicy Lamb Chops Get a Quick Sear and Finish in the Oven

I enjoy the complex flavors of Moroccan food, but I don't often have the time to make the long-simmered stews called *tagines* that I love so much. This recipe for lamb chops uses many of the same ingredients and layers of flavors that make *tagines* so appealing, but it takes only about half an hour to cook.

Because this dish cooks quickly, you'll need to use rib or loin chops. (Shoulder chops have to be cooked slowly until well done, or they'll be tough.) After rubbing on my quick-to-make spice rub, I let the chops sit for a bit to let the flavors from the rub permeate the meat. Just as important to the flavor of this dish, however, is searing the meat to give it a tasty crust. For a good sear, start with a hot pan. As soon as you put the lamb chops in the pan, give the pan a brisk shake back and forth; this will keep the meat from sticking. Then let the chops cook undisturbed for a few minutes to get a thorough sear before turning them over. Though this searing takes some time up front, it will lessen the time the lamb needs to finish cooking in the oven.

For the best flavor, be sure your spices taste fresh. I find that ground ginger really loses its flavor after about six months in the pantry. As a rule, I replace any spices that

have lost their aroma or have changed color.

Plain couscous is delicious with this dish, and it's a snap to make. For a more elaborate dish, cook the couscous in chicken broth flavored with a couple of saffron threads and then toss the couscous with currants, chopped scallions, and toasted pine nuts.

Mindy Heiferling is a chef, writer, and consultant in New York City. She's the author of A Taste of Spring (Clarkson Potter). ♦



Spice-Scented Lamb Chops with Onion-Tomato Compote

This dish is wonderful with couscous (the instant kind cooks in five minutes) or with some good crusty bread. If you have ground turmeric on hand, a teaspoon added to the spice rub gives a deeper flavor and a golden hue. I like to garnish this dish with some chopped fresh cilantro. *Serves two.*

1 tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 tsp. plus 1 Tbs. olive oil
1 to 1 ¼ lb. lamb chops
(about 4 loin chops or 6 rib chops)
1 medium yellow onion
1 to 2 cloves garlic
Salt
3 canned plum tomatoes,
seeded and coarsely chopped
½ tsp. sweet paprika
¼ tsp. ground ginger
½ tsp. cayenne
1 tsp. honey

Heat the oven to 400°F. Combine the cumin, cinnamon, and black pepper with 1 tsp. of the olive oil. Rub this paste on the lamb chops and

let them stand at room temperature while you thinly slice the onion and finely chop the garlic.

In an ovenproof heavy-based medium skillet, heat the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil over medium-high heat. Sprinkle a little salt on the lamb chops and put the chops in the pan; give the pan a brisk shake. Sear the chops until one side is a deep reddish brown (this will take a few minutes). Turn the lamb over and sear the other side. Remove the lamb from the pan and reserve; don't wipe out the pan.

Add the onion and garlic to the pan and cook, scraping to dislodge any lamb drip-

pings, until the onion is soft, 8 to 10 min. Add the tomatoes, paprika, ginger, cayenne, and honey, stirring to combine. Nestle the chops back in the pan and put the pan in the oven. Remove the pan from the oven when the internal temperature of the lamb chops reaches 120° to 125°F on an instant-read thermometer (for medium rare), 5 to 10 min., depending on the thickness of the lamb chops.

Divide the lamb chops between two plates. The tomato compote should be quite thick; if it's watery, cook it a minute or two more over high heat. Spoon the compote over the chops. Sprinkle with cilantro, if you like, and serve.

Racy



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Seven Generations of Sugar Crisps

Mrs. Hanes' Moravian cookies are crisp and thin—so thin that it takes more than 100 cookies to fill a one-pound tin...not your typical sugar cookie. But Mrs. Travis Hanes' Moravian Sugar Crisp Company isn't so typical either. The family-run business in Clemmons, North Carolina, began seven generations ago when Bertha Crouch Foltz (the mother of the current president, Evva Hanes) started selling cookies to supplement the income of their dairy farm.

Hand-rolled, hand-cut, and hand-packed, these cookies differ little from the traditional recipe handed down from Mrs. Hanes' German ancestors, members of the Moravian Church (a religious group that began in the 15th century in the Czech region of Moravia and settled in America before the Revolutionary War.) The only real difference in today's cookies is that they're baked in an electric oven instead of the wood-stove Mrs. Foltz used. And Mrs. Hanes and company bake quite a few more than her mother did—more than one million last year.



Simple, all-natural ingredients go into the cookie dough.



Perfect rolling technique is crucial to a crisp wafer.



"Tissue-thin" takes on a new meaning in the experienced hands of the Moravian bakers.



You can practically hear the crunch when you look at these Ginger Crisps, made uniformly thin and crisp not by machines but by the skilled hands of bakers.



Fragile cookies need careful packing. The packers bundle short stacks of about 15 cookies in paper napkins or parchment and nestle them into a one-pound round tin for shipping.